E. C. Gaskell

THE
KNUTSFORD EDITION

THE WORKS OF

MRS. GASKELL

WITH INTRODUCTIONS
BY A. W. WARD

IN EIGHT VOLUMES

VOLUME II

CRANFORD

AND OTHER TALES

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

THE WORKS OF

MRS. GASKELL

KNUTSFORD EDITION ON THIN PAPER In 8 vols. F'cap 8vo. Each volume contains an Introduction by SIR A. W. WARD, formerly Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge.

I—MARY BARTON, AND OTHER TALES

II—CRANFORD, AND OTHER TALES

III—RUTH, AND OTHER TALES

IV—NORTH AND SOUTH

V—MY LADY LUDLOW, & OTHER TALES

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VII—COUSIN PHILLIS; A DARK NIGHT'S WORK, ETC.

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CRANFORD

AND OTHER TALES

By MRS. GASKELL

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

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INTRODUCTION TO "CRANFORD," ETC.

Among all Mrs. Gaskell's works, "Cranford," I take it, remains to this day the most general favourite. The popular voice, although, except in a proverbial way, it need not in literary any more than in other matters be regarded as infallible, in the present instance expresses an opinion which for half a century has prevailed in "two worlds." At home, the wide favour enjoyed by this brief series of sketches, strung together with easy grace like a wreath of flowers and ivy-leaves, has been shown by an almost continuous succession of editions. Some of these have been provided with introductions possessing an interest of their own—above all, that prefaced by Mrs. Thackeray-Ritchie's most charming tribute to a writer whose genius is in so many respects sympathetic to that of the authoress of "Elizabeth." Another well-written introduction is Dr. Brooke Herford's. His edition is illustrated, but not very happily; nor are Mr. T. H. Robinson's pictures uniformly successful, though he must be thanked for his portraits of Martha, staring at the Indian, and of Lady Glenmire, issuing forth, demurely happy, from church. Everybody knows Mr. Hugh Thomson's coloured illustrations, and the artistic designs of Mr. Brock. The unavoidable compliment of dramatisation has been likewise paid to "Cranford," or at least to "Scenes from Cranford," —with what measure of success I cannot venture to say;

so far as I know, no other of Mrs. Gaskell's works has incurred the peril of this kind of translation.

While, on this side of the Atlantic, French criticism, which has been rather cold to "Cranford," stands forth as something like an exception to the rule, American readers have consistently turned to this book among the works of its authoress with a wonderful unanimity of preference. "Cranford," wrote Mr. Charles Eliot Norton from Newport, U.S.A., in 1858, "is known and loved from Maine to California." Nor is it to be denied that if "Cranford" can justly be regarded as having originated, or helped to originate, a new school of fiction, it is in America that this school has most notably flourished. I do not, however, think that Miss Wilkins is to be held a genuine follower of Mrs. Gaskell, whom, in the opinion of some critics, she excels on her own ground. The introspectiveness of this distinguished American writer, and the complete predominance of the sentimental element in her delicate miniatures of faded lives, were alike foreign to Mrs. Gaskell's larger range and greater freedom of spirit. Of American writers of fiction whose successes have been quite recently achieved, I am not prepared to speak.

But—granting that the popularity of "Cranford" has not been equalled by that of any other of Mrs. Gaskell's works—could any sort of discussion be less profitable than that which attempts to analyse such plebiscites; to explain why one work of a much-read writer is more read than another; why, from this point of view, "Pickwick" has never been overtaken even by "David Copperfield," or why "Esmond" continues to distance both its predecessors and its successors from the same master-hand? In these and similar cases there are always a number of obvious reasons that go some way towards accounting for such results, while at the same time there remains, in the decisions of a quite irresponsible tribunal, something that defies explanation.

I would therefore, on the present occasion, rather not

deviate into comparisons which could hardly fail to be illusory. For the pathos of "Cranford" springs from the same source as that of its more intense counterpart in Mrs. Gaskell's earliest novel; and the humour which was in this series first abundantly made manifest was to mellow into the perfection which that quality reached in her latest literary work. But it may nevertheless be worth while to advert to some of the features to which this unpretentious but exquisite prose idyl owes its peculiar charm, and which have secured to it the unique position modestly occupied by it in our literature.

But, before I make the attempt, I should like to conciliate the goodwill of my readers by citing one other critic who found "Cranford" more enjoyable than any other of Mrs. Gaskell's works—and that critic is Mrs. Gaskell herself. Such verdicts, when delivered by authors, however eminent, on their own productions, are not always convincing, but they can never be uninteresting; and Mrs. Gaskell, it will be seen, has something to say here as to the unwritten as well as the written pages of her book. The following is an extract from a letter to Ruskin, who (as will be seen below) was one of the most ardent admirers of "Cranford":—

". . . and then again about 'Cranford!' I am so much pleased you like it. It is the only one of my own books that I can read again; but sometimes when I am ailing or ill, I take 'Cranford,' and, I was going to say, *enjoy* it (but that would not be pretty), laugh over it afresh. And it is true, too, for I have seen the cow that wore the grey-flannel jacket—and I know the cat that swallowed the lace that belonged to the lady that sent for the doctor that gave the . . . I am so glad your Mother likes it too. I will tell her a bit of 'Cranford' that I did not dare to put in, because I thought people would say it was ridiculous, and yet which really happened in Knutsford. Two good old ladies, friends of mine in my girlhood, had a niece who made a grand marriage, as grand marriages went in those days. . . . The bride and bridegroom came to stay with the two Aunts, who had bought a new dining-room carpet, as a sort of wedding welcome to the young people, but I am afraid it was rather lost upon them; for the first time they found it out was after

dinner, the day after they came. All dinner-time they had noticed that the neat maid-servant had performed a sort of *pas de basque*, hopping and striding with more grace than security to the dishes she held. When she had left the room, one lady said to the other: "Sister! I I think she'll do!"—"Yes," said the other; "she's managed very nicely." And then they began to explain that she was a fresh servant, and they had just laid down a new carpet with white spots or spaces over it, and they had been teaching this girl to vault or jump gracefully over these white places, lest her feet might dirty them! The beginning of 'Cranford' was one paper in 'Household Words'; and I never meant to write more, so killed Captain Brown very much against my will.

"See what you have drawn down upon yourself, by gratifying me so much! I'll stop now however. . . ."

The chapters which were, in June, 1853, republished under the collective title of "Cranford" originally appeared in "Household Words," at intervals from December 13, 1851, to May 21, 1853, under separate headings, in part supplied by Dickens, whose assiduity, skill, and, one might add, gusto, in the performance of such editorial functions were unrivalled. In justice to him, it should be noted that he was far from being led away by Captain Brown's "rather ostentatious preference" of "Mr. Boz" to Dr. Johnson in the opening sketch—where the humour of Miss Jenkyns' canons of criticism is just a trifle overstrained. On the contrary, as he wrote to Mrs. Gaskell, he took himself out of the text where he could, and substituted "Hood's Poems," no doubt for some work of his own, as the book which Captain Brown was reading when run over by the train. The text now stands neutrally: "some new book." (I wonder, by the way, how many readers of the opening description of the Cranford ladies identify "Miss Tyler" of cleanly memory as the "eccentric Aunt" who brought up Southey when a little boy, and who cramped his childhood with her restrictions, never allowing him "to do anything by which he might dirt himself.") As the chapters succeeded one another, and were "joyfully" welcomed by the editor, the unity of design which became apparent in them was quite

sufficient for the author's purpose; and, though the series as a whole is carried a little beyond the exigencies of such plot as it possesses, it cannot be said to be unduly spun out. Indeed, delightful as is the absence of all appearance of self-restraint in "Cranford," the book is not less enjoyable because it avoids all lengthiness and diffuseness.

Still, this prose idyl, as I have had no hesitation in calling it, stands as such, halfway between two species. The one is the novel or short tale which has been provided with a specific background, in order to produce the twofold effect of harmony and contrast; the other is the descriptive sketch or essay, which plays round its subject, like the sunshine and shade that give variety to the scene and expression to the figures occupying it. The literary derivation of "Cranford" is thus neither from "The Vicar of Wakefield," a tale whose thrilling interest is only enhanced, not produced, by its surroundings; nor from "The Essays of Elia," to which Lord Houghton compared it, but in which the irresistible charm of each successive gem is but a radiation from the individuality of the essayist. This derivation is not traceable even to the good Miss Mitford; for the strength of "Our Village" (1824) lies in the description of rural scenery and of the living figures forming its *staffage*, rather than in characterisation proper. Descriptions of nature as such were not specially in Mrs. Gaskell's way, though she was alive to the romantic beauty of the Welsh mountains and valleys which she so lovingly describes in "Ruth," as well as to the picturesque charm of country life and its setting, shown forth in some unforgettable scenes in "Cousin Phillis," and passages of "A Dark Night's Work," and other pieces. But her "walks in the country" (to borrow Miss Mitford's phrase) had for their starting-point and goal the abodes of men and women. Miss Mitford, no doubt, helped to raise and to vindicate an interest in simple things and humble conditions, and thus to carry on in prose the

more notable poetic work of Crabbe. But Mrs. Gaskell's observant and sympathetic humour, as it first fully displayed itself in "Cranford," had more in common with Miss Edgeworth's, and with that of a work which was an early and choice growth of a field destined in later days to yield much produce of a commoner kind—Galt's "Annals of the Parish" (1821). In Miss Austen, unsurpassed in the handling of the material within her reach, characterisation is all in all; she is clearly not moving in idyllic limits like Mrs. Gaskell in "Cranford," apart from the fact, so inimitably put by Mrs. Thackeray Ritchie, that "Miss Austen's ladies belong to a different condition of things, to a more lively, love-making set of people, both younger in age and older in generation than the Cranford ladies."

Mrs. Gaskell, though she occasionally, and nowhere perhaps more distinctly than in "Cranford," showed herself susceptible of the powerful contemporary influence of Dickens, could in no phase of her literary life have been justly described as an imitator, conscious or unconscious, of any writer, past or present, great or small. It is thus extremely unlikely that she owed her first conception of "Cranford" to any of the literary predecessors whose names have been mentioned above. At the same time, the process, essayed by her in this book, of transmuting actual experience and observation into widely recognisable types of human character and life, must have benefited from her known familiarity with a poet whose fame had not long passed its height when hers was dawning. She had been first drawn to Crabbe because of his insight into the life of the poor, and of the sympathy with them which his pictures had stimulated. She could not have failed to recognise his power of projecting himself into the inner life of his neighbours, and of imagining a complete character by closely watching a series of detailed manifestations of its principal features. It may seem far-fetched to suggest a connexion

between Crabbe's usually sombre and at times sardonic pictures of life and character, coloured in harmony or in contrast with the surrounding scenery, and Mrs. Gaskell's sunny imaginings; but some such connexion seems to me beyond doubt. It may be added that in "The Maid's Story," one of those "Tales of the Hall" in which Crabbe's powers exhibit themselves in their fullest maturity, some of the essential characteristics of Cranford life and society are to be found, as it were, *in nuce*:—

> "Poor grandmamma among the gentry dwelt
> Of a small town, and all the honour felt;
> Shrinking from all approaches to disgrace
> That might be marked in so genteel a place;
> Where every daily deed, as soon as done,
> Ran through the town as fast as it could run:—
> At dinners what appear'd—at cards who lost or won.
>
> "Our good appearance through the town was known,
> Hunger and thirst were matters of our own;
> And you would judge that she in scandal dealt
> Who told on what we fed, or how we felt."

Another of the "Tales of the Hall," "The Sisters," seems almost to shadow forth Miss Matty, the most attractive of all the figures that move across the tranquil scene of Cranford, and her behaviour, true to herself, at the critical season of the breaking of the bank which involved the loss of her fortune. Too much, of course, must not be made of what may be a mere coincidence. Possibly, as has been surmised, the incident of the stoppage of payment by the Town and Country Bank at Drumble, in which Miss Deborah Jenkyns had made so unfortunate an investment, was suggested by the failure of the Royal Dantery Bank at Macclesfield, in 1823; or, more probably, Mrs. Gaskell had in her mind the failure, in 1842, of the Bank of Manchester, with losses estimated at £800,000, and liabilities

not far short of that sum—a crash which inflicted terrible suffering on the shareholders.

Rarely have fact and fiction—*Wahrheit und Dichtung*—been more deftly interwoven than in "Cranford,"—the joint product of quick observation, tender remembrance, and fresh imaginative power. "The artist," wrote a critic of great ability, and a true lover of Mrs. Gaskell's works, in a note originally intended for use in the present edition,* "is no photographer, nor was Mrs. Gaskell ever such. . . . Cranford is Knutsford, and not Knutsford, just as Wahlheim in 'The Sorrows of Werther' is Garbenheim, and not Garbenheim, and Albert is Kestner, and not Kestner." And he cites from Weitbrecht's "Diesseits von Weimar" a passage which so admirably puts the difference between what is, and what is not, poetic truth, that it may be worth reproducing here. "The case is just the same with circumstances, relations of things, localities, events: nothing that might not at one time or another have happened just in the way described, or indeed may actually so have happened—and yet the whole story is perfectly new, and is a creation of the poet's. The way, too, of combining the different elements, of making the particular incident or characteristic derived from real life fit into the whole construction—this, again, is not a reproduction of what accidentally once was real, however closely it may seem to correspond to reality; but everything finds its proper place, its use and connexion, just as and where it suits the poet's new creation." The scenic background again, he continues, is used in the one artistically sound way; "nature, the surroundings of the landscape and of the human figures in it are not described and catalogued in detail for their own sake, with a geographically faithful reproduction of what accidentally was real, but it simply serves to express the state of mind and feeling of the human actors in the scene." Perplexing as such a

* The late William Thomas Arnold.

process may be to that pensive portion of the public which is never satisfied till in a work of fiction every place, character, incident, and situation has been identified,—on the principle—

"That nothing is save that which once hath been,"—

and after identification made requires nothing further for the completion of its satisfaction—there can be no doubt that this, and no other, was the process followed by the authoress of "Cranford."

As to the identity of Cranford and Knutsford, no clue was of course at any time required by those who knew anything of Mrs. Gaskell's life, of which so considerable a part had been spent at Knutsford. The book, to be sure, was actually written in Plymouth Grove, at Manchester; but the authoress seems at that date to have still been in the habit of paying a visit to the little Cheshire town not far away. Cranford, too, is in Cheshire—though, as Mrs. Ritchie says, we all of us remember a Cranford somewhere, and though an American young person told a friend of mine that it had taken her long to realise that Cranford was not a New England village. So great is the predominance of the personal over the merely local characterisation, that as Mrs. Gaskell told Mr. George Smith, "she often thought she would write a 'Cranford Abroad,' *i.e.* send Miss Pole abroad to write letters to Miss Matty." Nevertheless, the local colouring remains undeniable.

The county, of course, impresses itself upon the town; the rector would not let his daughter marry beneath her, because they were related "somehow" to Sir Peter Arley —an excellent and highly-flavoured compound, in which both the time-honoured Warburtons of Arley and the ennobled descendants of the historian Sir Peter Leycester are ingredients. But even in Mrs. Gaskell's early days, Knutsford could not quite overlook the fact that it was not

more than twenty miles distant from Manchester—the "Drumble" of our story, a pseudonym which still survives in facetious use by the agreeable author of "Collections and Recollections." Furthermore, Knutsford lies, or lay, on the great south road to London—a circumstance formerly of much moment to the prosperity of the town, and of the Royal George Inn in particular, where Miss Pole, when on her way to see "her Betty's second cousin, who is chambermaid there," accidentally met the conjuror in the passage to the historic Assembly Room. The painstaking townsfolk have identified a house and shop in Top Street, just where the passage comes out of the George Yard, as the domicile where Miss Matty sold tea; and Brook House near the chapel—once the abode of the celebrated spinster Lady Jane Stanley, to whom the footpaths in the street owe their pavements—as the residence of the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson. The "Shire Lane," mentioned in "Cranford," is taken to be Minshull Street; and the Ladies' Seminary, to which all the tradespeople in "Cranford" sent their daughters, is said to have been Heath House, presided over by a Mrs. Stokes. I can find nothing about the "large, rambling house" occupied by Mrs. Fitz-Adam, which had formerly belonged to an earl's daughter, married to a general of the days of the American War, who wrote comedies,—evidently General John Burgoyne, who had in early life eloped with Lady Charlotte Stanley, and who (as Horace Walpole prophesied) would perhaps have liked to be remembered as author of "The Heiress" after the surrender of Saratoga had been forgotten. (He is mentioned again by name in a later passage of the book.) The "Benefit Society for the Poor," started by Deborah and her mother, is the Female Benefit Society, founded by Mrs. Holland of Church House in 1806, and said to be still in existence. The "Cranford" races, by which all the post-horses of the town were absorbed, are the Knutsford races, which continued, we learn, from

1729 to 1873. The humbler locality of the lime-pit, into which the cow fell, who came out burnt and was put into a flannel waistcoat, is on the Northwich Road, where there were a number of pits along that side of the Heath; and the truth of the story itself was attested, if not by the cow, at least by her owner. More to the purpose is the conjecture that "Woodley," the bachelor mansion of good Mr. Holbrook, with its old-fashioned garden among fields, is Sandle Bridge, the country house some two or three miles beyond the town, belonging to the Holland family, where the mother of Mrs. Gaskell had lived with her grandfather, who farmed his own land.

Mrs. Gaskell's rare gift of blending personal memories with imaginary traits suggested by her own gentle fancy and kindly humour is best displayed in the pictures of "Cranford" by their central figures, Miss Deborah and Miss Matty Jenkyns. It cannot be doubted that these delightful creations reproduced, with a freedom of treatment not out of harmony with affectionate personal attachment, the figures of Mrs. Gaskell's cousins, Miss Mary and Miss Lucy, daughters of Mr. Peter Holland of Church House, Knutsford, surgeon—whose son was the eminent London physician, Sir Henry Holland. They were, both of them, admirable women; and the elder, Miss Mary, was a personage quite out of the common. At one time she was much in London, where she became the friend of Hallam, Miss Edgeworth, and other distinguished people, and acted as a judicious guardian of her nephews and niece after their mother's death. On their father's second marriage she returned to Knutsford, where she became a great power for good, by her active interest in charitable and other organisations, and by the generous self-sacrifice which enabled her in many instances to aid struggling poverty. To one of Miss Lucy Holland's accomplishments the frontispiece of the present edition bears witness. So much it seemed necessary to say, in order to

place on record Mrs. Gaskell's strong affection for those high-minded and benevolent ladies, and to supplement the following inimitable letters, written from Knutsford more than twenty years after the publication of "Cranford," by Mrs. Mary Sibylla Holland—a gifted member of a gifted family—in a vein of humour almost equal to Mrs. Gaskell's own.*

Mrs. Holland writes from Knutsford, where she was staying with her aunts, Miss Mary and Lucy Holland, as follows:—

To Mrs. Deacon.

"Church House, Knutsford,
"May, 1874.

"My dear Mary,

". . . Time goes very slowly in this little old-world place. The aunts are so worn out and feeble, and the talk is of such far-gone matters, that my own affairs bear an air of unreality. Aunt Lucy forgets Michael's existence, but still laments that Aunt Mary would add two feet to the wall on which she used to perch Michael's father, in order that the people on the London coach might remark his fair long curls; and Aunt Mary still blames Lady Holland for dressing the boys in jackets, instead of the green velvet coats, with gold buttons and wide frilled collars, in which they looked so handsome. And Aunt Lucy says that there were many more birds' nests before the Reform Bill, which taught the farmers to trim the hedges so close, and wonders that I have never heard of Romper Low, the highwayman, who lived on the Heath here, and had an underground passage to Old Tabley, and who was so civil to the Miss Rumbolds when they met him and asked him to take care of them over the Heath to Church House, and how Dr. Holland met him afterwards and thanked him. It is so strange to hear all this, and the very primroses and lambs look as if they were only a remembrance too, and they are not real to the old aunts, they only remind them of the real lambs of fifty or sixty or seventy years back . . . . We breakfast here at 8 o'clock, eat a biscuit at 12, dine at four, and a *tray* at eight o'clock. Aunt Lucy said to me this morning,

* I am allowed to quote these passages from a very charming book, the "Letters of Mary Sibylla Holland," edited by her son, Mr. Bernard Holland (Edward Arnold: 1898). The writer of these letters had something in her of Eugénie de Guérin; if there was not a little of poetry in her life, there was certainly much of it in her nature.

'Don't take ginger wine to-night, Sybil love, there's not much left, and Mary will not like another bottle opened, as there is no company but you.'

"This evening we are to read old letters—Edgeworth's, Barbauld's, Aitken's, Darwin's, Wedgewood's, all that old set. Sir Henry Holland always figures as the fashionable young man in the vortex of London Society. Miss Edgeworth's letters are charming, and there are drawers full of them. . . ."

"Knutsford,
"6th December [1874].

"My dearest Mary,

"It is long past midnight, and I have been buried alive in the feathers of the old four-poster with drab curtains for more than an hour. *Two* hot water-bottles were interred with me to make up for the want of fire in the outer world. Such a storm of wind roaring round this old house, and the rain slashing against the window that commands the churchyard where the grave-stones all lie flat and close together. I cannot sleep or read, and I have been lying staring into the dark till my head aches. Below this room is the surgery, to which a long stone passage leads. I can quite well hear the two old doctors moving about and rattling their medicine bottles, making up drugs for the people who have long since been in the churchyard. The two old aunts are just the same as when I saw them last, only more weak and weary of life. They are wheeled off to bed about nine o'clock, but then comes the moment of the companion, who brings out an acrostic of her own making, so vague that there is not the slightest clue to the meaning, and I have to puzzle over it till ten. The evening begins at five, and is only interrupted by the tray of Oswego and bun-loaf. You cannot imagine to what a low ebb of mind and body it brings one. . . . However, I have written away my ghosts, and am so cold that the hot water-bottle lumps look not unfriendly under the quilt."

"Knutsford,
"22nd May [1876].

". . . . Shall you be driving in our direction on Friday, or may I come over on Saturday. . . . Only I am half dead, and feel as if none of us would survive the thunderstorm which is crashing over the town at this moment. Aunt Lucy neither hears it nor sees. She is recovering from a fit of choking into which I sent her, *me miseram!* by a mild little joke at tea, and, as has often been remarked, the disturbance of the inner man is more terrible than all the convulsions of nature.

"I thought of you all on Sunday morning. The old ladies, though

dissenters,* and even on bad terms with the parson, keep a rigid hold on the house-pew, which is situated in the N.E. aisle of the church, under the great ten-tiered gallery, and in a line with the Three-decker. It was re-lined with baize in 1801. Date in brass nails on the door. The corners are wide and the hassocks large, and I am ashamed to confess that the seclusion was not uncomfortable. Not a soul could see save the parson himself. . . .

"P.S.—It is so difficult to get paper here, for one cannot stir without waking an aunt, and then one has to talk or read. I was ten minutes trying to hook this piece of paper noiselessly on to my knee."

Out of these materials, and materials such as these, the authoress of "Cranford" wove a fabric of light texture indeed, but united by a more perfect harmony than could have been secured by the most skilfully contrived plot. The harmony of "Cranford" is that of the pictures which nature unconsciously invents and "arranges" for us—a summer-morning in an old garden, an evening on a lake, and so forth. Not only is nothing out of place, but everything is as it must have been—thus and not otherwise: such is the consummate effect of an artistic creation in which a nice æsthetical perception is sustained by a sure ethical sense, in which good taste and good feeling are conjoined; and where, whether the grave or the gay moments of human life are reproduced, love is lord. "Cranford," as I have hinted, can hardly be said to own a plot; though the story of Peter, his departure, his disappearance (suggested by that of Mrs. Gaskell's brother Charles), and his return, serves as a general thread, and is skilfully connected with the downfall of his sister Matty's worldly prosperity. Room is easily found for the bye-plots of Mr. Holbrook's untold love, and of Lady Glenmire's condescension in marrying an honest man and making herself happy in defiance of the principles and feelings of Cranford. On the other hand, the picture-book is full of figures which have contrived to secure for themselves a place very near that of the chosen favourites of English fiction—Captain Brown, carrying

* Unitarians.

the poor old woman's baked mutton and potatoes safe home on a very slippery Sunday, but unequal, good-natured as he is, even to one glass of Miss Jenkyns' mixture in the way of wine; Mr. Holbrook striding along his fields, and soothed by his pipe into a silence broken only by quotations; Signor Brunoni, the conjurer, and his faithful wife (truly Dickensian characters these); and, primarily and through the whole book, the "Amazonian sisterhood" in possession of the little place—the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson, its acknowledged head; Mrs. Forrester, her prophet; Miss Pole, the spirit who enquires and denies, and the two sisters themselves. Into the privacy of the pair we are admitted by the demure chronicler, in whose observant eye we never seem to escape the terrible: Miss Debōrah, as she preferred to be accentuated (because her father had once said that the Hebrew name ought to be so pronounced); and Miss Matty, the true heroine of the book, one of the sweetest creations of English domestic fiction—a faded violet round which still hovers the scent of spring. It is not surprising that the wealth of character-drawing, and of tender and humorous fancies, crowded into a single chapter like that entitled "Old Letters" should have taken the reading world by surprise, and should have been joyously hailed by the great English humorist who stood godfather to this new arrival in a domain where his own mastery was acknowledged. John Forster, whose sound critical judgment so often confirmed, if it occasionally corrected, the literary instincts of Dickens, was from the first charmed with "Cranford." "I can hardly tell you," he wrote to Mrs. Gaskell on the appearance of the earliest portion, "with how much pleasure I could quarrel with you for killing the poor Captain; but that the scene of the daughter's death"—surely the most beautiful scene in the book—"could not have been written without it." And later: "Miss Jenkyns is gone—the more's the pity; but Miss Matty is left. . . ." And before the *dénouement:* "I hope,

if Peter is to die in India, he'll leave Matty really well off, after all her troubles." And it is no less easy to understand why the fascination exercised by the first leaves of the book remained when they and their successors were gathered lightly together into an inimitable gift of genius in its holiday mood, at whose conception the sun had shone or a star had laughed, and which had quite unconsciously become a classic of our literature. As such it was welcomed by two great writers, whose words of pleasure may fitly close this note. Charlotte Brontë, who had accompanied the progress of the book with unfailing delight, on receiving it from the authoress in its completed form, read it over twice, "once to myself, and once aloud to my Father. I find it pleasurable reading: graphic, pithy, penetrating, shrewd, yet kind and indulgent." And here, by way of parallel, is part of the letter from Ruskin, dated February 21, 1865, the reply to which has been already cited.

". . . I have just been reading 'Cranford' out to my Mother. She has read it about 5 times; but, the first time I tried, I flew into a passion at Captain Brown's being killed and wouldn't go any further—but this time my Mother coaxed me past it—and then I enjoyed it mightily. I do not know when I have read a more finished little piece of study of human nature (a very great and good thing when it is not spoiled). Nor was I ever more sorry to come to a book's end. I can't think why you left it off! You might have killed Miss Matty, as you're fond of killing nice people, and then gone on with Jessie's children, or made yourself an old lady—in time—it would have been lovely. I can't write more to-day."

Of the other productions included in this volume, the little sketch of "Christmas Storms and Sunshine"—half humorous and half pathetic, and perhaps altogether more in Dickens' manner, and in the Christmas variety of it, than anything else from Mrs. Gaskell's hand—has already been mentioned in the Introduction to our preceding volume. The conjecture has there also been hazarded that "Lizzie Leigh" was very possibly written, in part at least, before

"Mary Barton," of which one of the most pathetic episodes—the history of the outcast Ellen—is to be found in a measure either anticipated or reproduced in the shorter tale. To "Lizzie Leigh" Dickens accorded the signal honour of assigning a place to the first portion of it in the first number of "Household Words" (March 30, 1850). He had written to Mrs. Gaskell, announcing the scheme of his new venture, which was in truth to exercise a distinct influence upon English popular prose, and asked her collaboration in the most flattering terms. "Lizzie Leigh" was first reprinted in book form, together with a number of other tales by Mrs. Gaskell, in 1855.

The publicity, at once so conspicuous and so honourable, accorded to "Lizzie Leigh" by the most popular master of English fiction not only showed the insight which was characteristic of him as an editor, but illustrated the continuance of a widespread public interest in the life of the manufacturing districts in the north, which "Mary Barton" had so largely helped to diffuse. The spirit of "Mary Barton" is in this short tale, which moved Dr. Arnold's widow to a letter of sympathetic praise, ending with the solemn wish: "May the sinful and the sorrowful and the oppressed be taught and cheered and helped by you as they severally need; and may the hard be softened, and the careless roused." "Lizzie Leigh" is a genuine Lancashire tale; its scene is laid at Rochdale, a representative locality to this day of Lancashire as it was and is. It also remains, or till recently remained, a home of the undiluted Lancashire dialect, which here or hereabouts stereotyped itself in certain much cherished literary products, and of which reminiscences are noticeable in some of the words and phrases incidentally introduced into the text of Mrs. Gaskell's story. Southerners should observe how in this story Manchester completely holds the place of a capital—a London of the north—to the folk of the districts around it. Though Susan Palmer, the generous girl to whom Will

Leigh, the country-looking, broad-shouldered immigrant from the country farm, loses his heart, happens to be a school-teacher, she is a genuine type of a Manchester factory girl—to her rural lover the very model of all that is town-bred, and "like a lady, with her smooth, colourless complexion, her bright, dark hair, and her spotless dress."

"The Well of Pen-Morfa," which was first printed in "Household Words," on November 16 and 23, 1850, and reprinted with "Lizzie Leigh" in 1855, must have been a result of impressions made on its authoress by one or more of the visits paid by her to Wales in the earlier course of her married life—impressions that came to be tinged with an inevitable hue of sadness. It cannot, I think, be reckoned among her successful productions; for the tone of sentiment which dominates it is unusual with her, and indeed verges upon sentimentality of an almost morbid kind.

"The Moorland Cottage," on the other hand, which appeared as a Christmas book in 1850, with illustrations by Birket Foster, who at that time enjoyed much popularity, though it may exhibit some traces of the comparative haste with which it was written (and Mrs. Gaskell thoroughly disliked writing to order), certainly deserves not to be overlooked in the progressive series of her works. Miss Brontë wrote of it that "it opens like a morning daisy, and finishes like a herb—a balsamic herb with healing in its leaves." Not only does "The Moorland Cottage" show very distinct traces of that quieter but more subtle species of humour of which the writer was gradually to become a perfect mistress; but the figure of little Maggie, descending from her retreat under the knotted thorn-tree on her particular grey rock, to do her duty simply, nobly, heroically, is an inspiration direct from Nature's source, and, especially as

contrasted with the charming but volatile Erminia, is a sort of first sketch of Mrs. Gaskell's latest and most finished pictures of womanhood in blossom and in bud. The good old servant Nancy is likewise a type which the author was afterwards to take a particular pleasure in elaborating, and which was to reappear in "Ruth." In Maggie's ne'er-do-weel brother we may also recognise a rather more melodramatic prototype of Dick Bradshaw in the same novel. If the rather melodramatic turns in "The Moorland Cottage" betray the circumstance that it was pre-eminently designed for family reading, the story as a whole has not suffered greatly from the obligations which it had to meet.

"The Heart of John Middleton," first printed in "Household Words," December 28, 1850, and reprinted with "Lizzie Leigh" in 1855, is a story of a different kind; and, while very beautiful in conception, has a rugged force and an intensity due to the strength of Mrs. Gaskell's abiding conviction that the forgiveness of injuries is the most sacred of Christian duties. The direct power of its simple pathos comes straight home; and no tale of real or imagined life ever better illustrated the experience that in a great heart there may be room for a very small diversity of emotions. The scene is laid in the classic vicinity of Pendle Forest (Pendle Hill); and the clue furnished by the mention of "a row of houses where one Mr. Peel came to live for the sake of the water-power" (Osbaldtwistle in the lower division of the hundred of Blackburn, where Robert Peel the elder set up his calico-printing manufactory, and where, at Peelfold, Robert Peel the younger was born), identifies "Sawley," which "sprang up into a village in the time of the monks, who had an abbey there," with Whalley, renowned for its ancient Cistercian foundation. By the same token the "Bribble" is of course the Ribble. The fine scene, which here has so disastrous an ending, in which Nelly makes herself a shield for John, perhaps contains the germ of the well-known

situation, elaborated with masterly skill, in "North and South."

Another "Household Words" contribution, printed there on June 7, 1851, as a paper which the editor pronounced to be "exactly suited to us," and reprinted with "Lizzie Leigh," is the amusing "Disappearances." It shows that Mrs. Gaskell's love of the mysterious was, as is the case with some other votaries of the insoluble, quite compatible with a cheerful frame of mind—if so much may be inferred from the humour which marks the style of this singularly bright composition. Some capital stories are here strung together in illustration of the text that mysterious disappearances have ceased to be mysterious, since we possess a detective police putting "Caleb Williams" out of date—though its machinery may fall short of perfection in the scientific eyes of a Sherlock Holmes.

On the first of these anecdotes some strictures are passed in one of the most amusing volumes of modern English biography. I say "volumes," for the second volume of Mr. Samuel Butler's "Life and Letters of Dr. Samuel Butler," Headmaster of Shrewsbury School, and afterwards Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry, is too purely ecclesiastical in theme to be fitly described by such an epithet. But, in vol. i., pp. 98–9 of this delightful book, Bishop Butler's biographer, after telling the tale of the disappearance, in circumstances similar to those given in Mrs. Gaskell's version of the incident, of an old bedridden tailor named Owen Parfitt, who lived at Western Shepton in the parish of Shepton Mallet, states that Dr. Butler took a special interest in the story. He accordingly tried in every way by investigation to clear up its mystery, but without success. Mr. S. Butler then notes that the late Rev. William Maskell, whose father was in his day the leading solicitor at Shepton Mallet, in 1857, published a short account of the story, which may be assumed to have been quite plain, and was

certainly unvarnished. For Mr. Maskell considered the "Household Words" narrative to be "a curious example of a narrative, distorted and untrue, but apparently resting on the most trustworthy proof." "Almost every particular in it," according to the lawyer's son, "rests on imagination. Whether the old lady, 'the cousin of the Sneyds,' etc., was a myth also, no one can tell; but the scene being laid in Shropshire leads us to conclude that Dr. Butler was the original teller of the story right enough, perhaps at first from himself, but in after years altered, not only as to the circumstances, but as to the place and country." We may cherish a hope that Mrs. Gaskell, who thoroughly understood the art of telling a story, never revealed to any one born or bred in the law what in her "version" were the proportions of inevitable accretion and legitimate improvement.

Of the remaining anecdotes of "Disappearances," the last in order of succession refers to Gerrard or Garrat Hall in Ancoats, distant about a mile from Mrs. Gaskell's own house in Plymouth Grove—an ancient hall formerly in the possession of a member of the Trafford family, for whom the boys of the Manchester Grammar School were bound to offer daily prayer as one of their benefactors. But the story of his successor to the property, unlike that of the Shropshire tailor, I should be slow to seek to identify, although he is conjectured to have been a shoot of "a branch of the tree of the Lord of the Manor of Manchester." But even greater than he, if my remembrance of a recent case do not deceive me, have been suspected, on evidence which would probably not have satisfied the Maskells, father or son, of "disappearing," and of reappearing, like the middle-aged gentleman of Mrs. Gaskell's anecdote, in circumstances which required a good deal of hushing up.

"The Old Nurse's Story," which formed part of the

1852 Christmas number of "Household Words," on the sound principle that, when tales are told in front of the yule log, a ghost story or two should not be wanting in the cycle—was reprinted with "Lizzie Leigh" in 1855. It is a most satisfying ghost story, from which none of the approved ingredients is left out, while nothing superfluous is allowed to lessen its effect. But this effect is in part at least due to the art which, with a few simple strokes, could produce a picture at once so strange and so true as that of the moonlight night on the snow-covered fells, where the child was found asleep under the holly-trees. It has been mentioned before, that, to Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens was, as to his other contributors distinguished or undistinguished, alike suggestive and considerate; and it is interesting to note that when she declined to adopt the ending proposed by him for "The Old Nurse's Story," he readily acquiesced.

"Morton Hall," published in "Household Words" in two successive numbers, November 19 and 26, 1853, was also reprinted with "Lizzie Leigh" two years afterwards. It is a pretty and pathetic tale of the fortunes of an old Lancashire hall, and of the family with whom it sank away, so to speak, from its own identity. The earlier, and principal, part of the story is told with an art to which in a letter to Mrs. Gaskell, John Forster rendered not more than justice:—

> "Anybody but you would have made the tragedy of it unbearable—but you have the art of softening this, of relieving it by little homely touches, and putting such a tender sweetness into it, of setting round and neighbouring it with so much quiet good-hearted humour."

But the last portion of the story, a somewhat hard specimen of the "Cranford" manner, is hardly equal to the rest. The late Mr. Boughton ought to have painted Mistress Alice on the sunny hall steps or in the chill house shadow,

or the sweet Phillis "whirling round, and making cheeses with her rich silk petticoat"—or the faint shadow of Phillis in her days of suffering and self-sacrifice.

Morton Hall is placed by the narrator of its vicissitudes "about five miles from the centre of Drumble." Thus it may have been suggested by Ouse End, or by Old Garratt Hall, to which reference was made above; but there is nothing beyond the above localisation to indicate that it was drawn from either. It seems certainly to have nothing to do with what is commonly but erroneously called "Moreton Old Hall" in the parish of Astbury, in the hundred of Macclesfield. Neither the large modern stone-house in Great Moreton—one of the two townships and manors in the parish—nor the old "black-and-white" house in Little Moreton adjoining, suit its description or its supposed history.

"Traits and Stories of Huguenots" (published in "Household Words," December 10, 1853,) and "My French Master" (published in the same journal on December 17 and 24 following, and reprinted, like its predecessor, in 1855) easily introduce themselves. Both, as I have said before, attest Mrs. Gaskell's cordial interest in French life and character, and they likewise show that this interest was partly based on historical studies. For both these productions take a fairly wide range of view, though in treating of the Huguenot refugees Mrs. Gaskell could hardly be expected to make allowance in Henry IV.'s "unworthy son," Louis XIII., or in his great minister, Richelieu, for motives which were by no means entirely those of religious hatred. As for the ingratitude shown by a later Bourbon king to the refugees of a later date who returned with him, but were not, like him, privileged to "enjoy their own again," worse instances might be quoted than that of M. de Chalabre. His figure in Mrs. Gaskell's pretty sketch has a charm resembling that

with which a most accomplished actor—the late Mr. Alfred Wigan—invested the character of the French usher, fated in the days of his exile on the Adelphi boards to construe "Télémaque" to that most winsome of English schoolboys—the late Mrs. Keeley.

The last piece contained in the present volume, "The Squire's Story," was contributed to another "Household Words" Christmas Number (1853), and reprinted, like its predecessors, with "Lizzie Leigh." It is an admirably told page of the earlier history of Knutsford (here disguised afresh under the name of Barford) where on the "heath" the house—the ivy-grown Cann office, where, of old, weights and scales were tested—is still shown that harboured for some years this celebrated gentleman of the road. His story is told at length in Mr. Henry Green's "Knutsford: its Traditions and History" (2nd edn., 1887), where, besides the florid version of the story in the "Autobiographic Sketches" of De Quincey, are given some "Extracts respecting Edward Higgins," from Hinchliffe's "Account of the Parish of Barthomley," and a "true history" of the highwayman's career, and his execution at Carmarthen, on November 7, 1767, from the "Universal Museum and Complete Magazine" (vol. iii., November, 1767). To these Mr. Green subjoins what may be a less authentic document, "A true Coppy of a Letter delivered to the Sheriff by Edward Higgins at the time of his execution"—the culprit's last confession, as recorded on a broadsheet, with appropriate engravings. The period of time during which Higgins resided at Knutsford (which earlier in the century had been, but incidentally only, favoured by a visit from Dick Turpin) is dated by the register of the Parish Church, also cited by Mr. Green, showing him to have been married there in 1757, and to have had five of his children baptized there—the fifth in 1764, so that he must have lived in the parish something

like eight years at all events. He was received into the best county society, and Mr. Hinchliffe met him at Oulton Park, the seat of Mr. Egerton, whom he is said on this occasion to have deprived of a handsome snuff-box. On another occasion he met Lady Warburton of Arley at the Knutsford assembly, and, leaving early, met her on the road home, when her addressing him by his name probably saved her jewels. Other exploits in house-breaking, shop-lifting, and highway robberies are recorded of him by his historians; De Quincey (who must have known, as he saw Higgins' skeleton in the Manchester Natural History Museum) is responsible for the famous anecdote, that "on certain nights, when, perhaps, he had *extra* motives for concealing the fact of having been abroad, he drew woollen stockings over his horse's feet, with the purpose of deadening the sound in riding up a brick-paved entry, common to his own stable and that of a respectable neighbour." The perpetrator of the murder at Bristol (for which Bath is substituted in "The Squire's Story,") mentioned both by De Quincey and in the confession, remained undiscovered at the time; and Higgins had quitted Knutsford some time before he was caught as a house-breaker at West Mead in Wales, and tried and sentenced to death at Carmarthen. His last exploit—though this may have been merely an act of friendship on the part of a companion in arms—was the forging of Lord Shelburne's signature to a letter of respite, which would have served its purpose but for the post-mark.

Mrs. Gaskell's narrative is a model of its kind in clearness and terseness. Verisimilitude is judiciously substituted for fact, and the character of "Barford" for intelligence saved, by the statement that at the time of Mr. Higgins' residence in the town, "there were no stage-coaches within forty miles" of it.

A. W. W.

April, 1906.

CRANFORD

CHAPTER I

OUR SOCIETY

In the first place, Cranford is in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses above a certain rent are women. If a married couple come to settle in the town, somehow the gentleman disappears; he is either fairly frightened to death by being the only man in the Cranford evening parties, or he is accounted for by being with his regiment, his ship, or closely engaged in business all the week in the great neighbouring commercial town of Drumble, distant only twenty miles on a railroad. In short, whatever does become of the gentlemen, they are not at Cranford. What could they do if they were there? The surgeon has his round of thirty miles, and sleeps at Cranford; but every man cannot be a surgeon. For keeping the trim gardens full of choice flowers without a weed to speck them; for frightening away little boys who look wistfully at the said flowers through the railings; for rushing out at the geese that occasionally venture into the gardens if the gates are left open; for deciding all questions of literature and politics without troubling themselves with unnecessary reasons or arguments; for obtaining clear and correct knowledge of everybody's affairs in the parish; for keeping their neat maid-servants in admirable order; for kindness (somewhat dictatorial) to the poor, and real tender good offices to each other whenever they are in distress, the ladies of Cranford are quite sufficient. "A man," as one of them observed to me once, "is *so* in the way in the house!"

Cranford

Although the ladies of Cranford know all each other's proceedings, they are exceedingly indifferent to each other's opinions. Indeed, as each has her own individuality, not to say eccentricity, pretty strongly developed, nothing is so easy as verbal retaliation; but, somehow, good-will reigns among them to a considerable degree.

The Cranford ladies have only an occasional little quarrel, spirted out in a few peppery words and angry jerks of the head; just enough to prevent the even tenor of their lives from becoming too flat. Their dress is very independent of fashion; as they observe, "What does it signify how we dress here at Cranford, where everybody knows us?" And if they go from home, their reason is equally cogent, "What does it signify how we dress here, where nobody knows us?" The materials of their clothes are, in general, good and plain, and most of them are nearly as scrupulous as Miss Tyler, of cleanly memory; but I will answer for it, the last gigot, the last tight and scanty petticoat in wear in England, was seen in Cranford—and seen without a smile.

I can testify to a magnificent family red silk umbrella, under which a gentle little spinster, left alone of many brothers and sisters, used to patter to church on rainy days. Have you any red silk umbrellas in London? We had a tradition of the first that had ever been seen in Cranford; and the little boys mobbed it, and called it "a stick in petticoats." It might have been the very red silk one I have described, held by a strong father over a troop of little ones; the poor little lady—the survivor of all—could scarcely carry it.

Then there were rules and regulations for visiting and calls; and they were announced to any young people who might be staying in the town, with all the solemnity with which the old Manx laws were read once a year on the Tinwald Mount.

"Our friends have sent to inquire how you are after your journey to-night, my dear" (fifteen miles in a gentleman's carriage); "they will give you some rest to-morrow, but

the next day, I have no doubt, they will call; so be at liberty after twelve—from twelve to three are our calling hours."

Then, after they had called—

"It is the third day; I dare say your mamma has told you, my dear, never to let more than three days elapse between receiving a call and returning it; and also, that you are never to stay longer than a quarter of an hour."

"But am I to look at my watch? How am I to find out when a quarter of an hour has passed?"

"You must keep thinking about the time, my dear, and not allow yourself to forget it in conversation."

As everybody had this rule in their minds, whether they received or paid a call, of course no absorbing subject was ever spoken about. We kept ourselves to short sentences of small talk, and were punctual to our time.

I imagine that a few of the gentlefolks of Cranford were poor, and had some difficulty in making both ends meet; but they were like the Spartans, and concealed their smart under a smiling face. We none of us spoke of money, because that subject savoured of commerce and trade, and though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic. The Cranfordians had that kindly *esprit de corps* which made them overlook all deficiencies in success when some among them tried to conceal their poverty. When Mrs. Forrester, for instance, gave a party in her baby-house of a dwelling, and the little maiden disturbed the ladies on the sofa by a request that she might get the tea-tray out from underneath, every one took this novel proceeding as the most natural thing in the world, and talked on about household forms and ceremonies as if we all believed that our hostess had a regular servants' hall, second table, with housekeeper and steward, instead of the one little charity-school maiden, whose short ruddy arms could never have been strong enough to carry the tray upstairs, if she had not been assisted in private by her mistress, who now sat in state, pretending not to know what cakes were sent up, though she knew, and we knew,

and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew that we knew, she had been busy all the morning making tea-bread and sponge-cakes.

There were one or two consequences arising from this general but unacknowledged poverty, and this very much acknowledged gentility, which were not amiss, and which might be introduced into many circles of society to their great improvement. For instance, the inhabitants of Cranford kept early hours, and clattered home in their pattens, under the guidance of a lantern-bearer, about nine o'clock at night; and the whole town was abed and asleep by half-past ten. Moreover, it was considered "vulgar" (a tremendous word in Cranford) to give anything expensive, in the way of eatable or drinkable, at the evening entertainments. Wafer bread-and-butter and sponge-biscuits were all that the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson gave; and she was sister-in-law to the late Earl of Glenmire, although she did practise such "elegant economy."

"Elegant economy!" How naturally one falls back into the phraseology of Cranford! There, economy was always "elegant," and money-spending always "vulgar and ostentatious;" a sort of sour-grapeism which made us very peaceful and satisfied. I never shall forget the dismay felt when a certain Captain Brown came to live at Cranford, and openly spoke about his being poor—not in a whisper to an intimate friend, the doors and windows being previously closed, but in the public street! in a loud military voice! alleging his poverty as a reason for not taking a particular house. The ladies of Cranford were already rather moaning over the invasion of their territories by a man and a gentleman. He was a half-pay captain, and had obtained some situation on a neighbouring railroad, which had been vehemently petitioned against by the little town; and if, in addition to his masculine gender, and his connection with the obnoxious railroad, he was so brazen as to talk of being poor—why, then, indeed, he must be sent to Coventry. Death was as true and as common as poverty; yet people never spoke about that, loud

out in the streets. It was a word not to be mentioned to ears polite. We had tacitly agreed to ignore that any with whom we associated on terms of visiting equality could ever be prevented by poverty from doing anything that they wished. If we walked to or from a party, it was because the night was *so* fine, or the air *so* refreshing, not because sedan-chairs were expensive. If we wore prints, instead of summer silks, it was because we preferred a washing material; and so on, till we blinded ourselves to the vulgar fact that we were, all of us, people of very moderate means. Of course, then, we did not know what to make of a man who could speak of poverty as if it was not a disgrace. Yet, somehow, Captain Brown made himself respected in Cranford, and was called upon, in spite of all resolutions to the contrary. I was surprised to hear his opinions quoted as authority at a visit which I paid to Cranford about a year after he had settled in the town. My own friends had been among the bitterest opponents of any proposal to visit the Captain and his daughters, only twelve months before; and now he was even admitted in the tabooed hours before twelve. True, it was to discover the cause of a smoking chimney, before the fire was lighted; but still Captain Brown walked upstairs, nothing daunted, spoke in a voice too large for the room, and joked quite in the way of a tame man about the house. He had been blind to all the small slights, and omissions of trivial ceremonies, with which he had been received. He had been friendly, though the Cranford ladies had been cool; he had answered small sarcastic compliments in good faith; and with his manly frankness had overpowered all the shrinking which met him as a man who was not ashamed to be poor. And, at last, his excellent masculine common sense, and his facility in devising expedients to overcome domestic dilemmas, had gained him an extraordinary place as authority among the Cranford ladies. He himself went on in his course, as unaware of his popularity as he had been of the reverse; and I am sure he was startled one day when he found his advice so highly esteemed as to make

some counsel which he had given in jest to be taken in sober, serious earnest.

It was on this subject: An old lady had an Alderney cow, which she looked upon as a daughter. You could not pay the short quarter of an hour call without being told of the wonderful milk or wonderful intelligence of this animal. The whole town knew and kindly regarded Miss Betsy Barker's Alderney; therefore great was the sympathy and regret when, in an unguarded moment, the poor cow tumbled into a lime-pit. She moaned so loudly that she was soon heard and rescued; but meanwhile the poor beast had lost most of her hair, and came out looking naked, cold, and miserable, in a bare skin. Everybody pitied the animal, though a few could not restrain their smiles at her droll appearance. Miss Betsy Barker absolutely cried with sorrow and dismay; and it was said she thought of trying a bath of oil. This remedy, perhaps, was recommended by some one of the number whose advice she asked; but the proposal, if ever it was made, was knocked on the head by Captain Brown's decided "Get her a flannel waistcoat and flannel drawers, ma'am, if you wish to keep her alive. But my advice is, kill the poor creature at once."

Miss Betsy Barker dried her eyes, and thanked the Captain heartily; she set to work, and by-and-by all the town turned out to see the Alderney meekly going to her pasture, clad in dark grey flannel. I have watched her myself many a time. Do you ever see cows dressed in grey flannel in London?

Captain Brown had taken a small house on the outskirts of the town, where he lived with his two daughters. He must have been upwards of sixty at the time of the first visit I paid to Cranford after I had left it as a residence. But he had a wiry, well-trained, elastic figure, a stiff military throw-back of his head, and a springing step, which made him appear much younger than he was. His eldest daughter looked almost as old as himself, and betrayed the fact that his real was more than his apparent age. Miss Brown must

have been forty; she had a sickly, pained, careworn expression on her face, and looked as if the gaiety of youth had long faded out of sight. Even when young she must have been plain and hard featured. Miss Jessie Brown was ten years younger than her sister, and twenty shades prettier. Her face was round and dimpled. Miss Jenkyns once said, in a passion against Captain Brown (the cause of which I will tell you presently), "that she thought it was time for Miss Jessie to leave off her dimples, and not always to be trying to look like a child." It was true there was something childlike in her face; and there will be, I think, till she dies, though she should live to a hundred. Her eyes were large blue wondering eyes, looking straight at you; her nose was unformed and snub, and her lips were red and dewy; she wore her hair, too, in little rows of curls, which heightened this appearance. I do not know whether she was pretty or not; but I liked her face, and so did everybody, and I do not think she could help her dimples. She had something of her father's jauntiness of gait and manner; and any female observer might detect a slight difference in the attire of the two sisters—that of Miss Jessie being about two pounds per annum more expensive than Miss Brown's. Two pounds was a large sum in Captain Brown's annual disbursements.

Such was the impression made upon me by the Brown family when I first saw them all together in Cranford Church. The Captain I had met before—on the occasion of the smoky chimney, which he had cured by some simple alteration in the flue. In church, he held his double eye-glass to his eyes during the Morning Hymn, and then lifted up his head erect and sang out loud and joyfully. He made the responses louder than the clerk—an old man with a piping feeble voice, who, I think, felt aggrieved at the Captain's sonorous bass, and quavered higher and higher in consequence.

On coming out of church, the brisk Captain paid the most gallant attention to his two daughters. He nodded and smiled to his acquaintances; but he shook hands with

none until he had helped Miss Brown to unfurl her umbrella, had relieved her of her prayer-book, and had waited patiently till she, with trembling nervous hands, had taken up her gown to walk through the wet roads.

I wondered what the Cranford ladies did with Captain Brown at their parties. We had often rejoiced, in former days, that there was no gentleman to be attended to, and to find conversation for, at the card-parties. We had congratulated ourselves upon the snugness of the evenings; and, in our love for gentility, and distaste of mankind, we had almost persuaded ourselves that to be a man was to be "vulgar;" so that when I found my friend and hostess, Miss Jenkyns, was going to have a party in my honour, and that Captain and the Miss Browns were invited, I wondered much what would be the course of the evening. Card-tables, with green baize tops, were set out by daylight, just as usual; it was the third week in November, so the evenings closed in about four. Candles, and clean packs of cards were arranged on each table. The fire was made up; the neat maid-servant had received her last directions; and there we stood, dressed in our best, each with a candle-lighter in our hands, ready to dart at the candles as soon as the first knock came. Parties in Cranford were solemn festivities, making the ladies feel gravely elated as they sat together in their best dresses. As soon as three had arrived, we sat down to "Preference," I being the unlucky fourth. The next four comers were put down immediately to another table; and presently the tea-trays, which I had seen set out in the store-room as I passed in the morning, were placed each on the middle of a card-table. The china was delicate egg-shell; the old-fashioned silver glittered with polishing; but the eatables were of the slightest description. While the trays were yet on the tables, Captain and the Miss Browns came in; and I could see that, somehow or other, the Captain was a favourite with all the ladies present. Ruffled brows were smoothed, sharp voices lowered at his approach. Miss Brown looked ill, and depressed almost to gloom. Miss Jessie smiled as usual, and

seemed nearly as popular as her father. He immediately and quietly assumed the man's place in the room; attended to every one's wants, lessened the pretty maid-servant's labour by waiting on empty cups and bread-and-butterless ladies; and yet did it all in so easy and dignified a manner, and so much as if it were a matter of course for the strong to attend to the weak, that he was a true man throughout. He played for threepenny points with as grave an interest as if they had been pounds; and yet, in all his attention to strangers, he had an eye on his suffering daughter—for suffering I was sure she was, though to many eyes she might only appear to be irritable. Miss Jessie could not play cards: but she talked to the sitters-out, who, before her coming, had been rather inclined to be cross. She sang, too, to an old cracked piano, which I think had been a spinet in its youth. Miss Jessie sang "Jock of Hazeldean" a little out of tune; but we were none of us musical, though Miss Jenkyns beat time, out of time, by way of appearing to be so.

It was very good of Miss Jenkyns to do this; for I had seen that, a little before, she had been a good deal annoyed by Miss Jessie Brown's unguarded admission (*à propos* of Shetland wool) that she had an uncle, her mother's brother, who was a shopkeeper in Edinburgh. Miss Jenkyns tried to drown this confession by a terrible cough—for the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson was sitting at the card-table nearest Miss Jessie, and what would she say or think if she found out she was in the same room with a shopkeeper's niece! But Miss Jessie Brown (who had no tact, as we all agreed the next morning) *would* repeat the information, and assure Miss Pole she could easily get her the identical Shetland wool required, "through my uncle, who has the best assortment of Shetland goods of any one in Edinbro'." It was to take the taste of this out of our mouths, and the sound of this out of our ears, that Miss Jenkyns proposed music; so I say again, it was very good of her to beat time to the song.

When the trays re-appeared with biscuits and wine, punctually at a quarter to nine, there was conversation,

comparing of cards, and talking over tricks; but by-and-by Captain Brown sported a bit of literature.

"Have you seen any numbers of 'The Pickwick Papers'?" said he. (They were then publishing in parts.) "Capital thing!"

Now Miss Jenkyns was daughter of a deceased rector of Cranford; and, on the strength of a number of manuscript sermons, and a pretty good library of divinity, considered herself literary, and looked upon any conversation about books as a challenge to her. So she answered and said, "Yes, she had seen them; indeed, she might say she had read them."

"And what do you think of them?" exclaimed Captain Brown. "Aren't they famously good?"

So urged, Miss Jenkyns could not but speak.

"I must say, I don't think they are by any means equal to Dr. Johnson. Still, perhaps, the author is young. Let him persevere, and who knows what he may become if he will take the great Doctor for his model?" This was evidently too much for Captain Brown to take placidly; and I saw the words on the tip of his tongue before Miss Jenkyns had finished her sentence.

"It is quite a different sort of thing, my dear madam," he began.

"I am quite aware of that," returned she. "And I make allowances, Captain Brown."

"Just allow me to read you a scene out of this month's number," pleaded he. "I had it only this morning, and I don't think the company can have read it yet."

"As you please," said she, settling herself with an air of resignation. He read the account of the "swarry" which Sam Weller gave at Bath. Some of us laughed heartily. *I* did not dare, because I was staying in the house. Miss Jenkyns sat in patient gravity. When it was ended, she turned to me, and said with mild dignity—

"Fetch me 'Rasselas,' my dear, out of the book-room."

When I brought it to her, she turned to Captain Brown—

"Now allow *me* to read you a scene, and then the present company can judge between your favourite, Mr. Boz, and Dr. Johnson."

She read one of the conversations between Rasselas and Imlac, in a high-pitched majestic voice: and when she had ended, she said, "I imagine I am now justified in my preference of Dr. Johnson as a writer of fiction." The Captain screwed his lips up, and drummed on the table, but he did not speak. She thought she would give a finishing blow or two.

"I consider it vulgar, and below the dignity of literature, to publish in numbers."

"How was the *Rambler* published, ma'am?" asked Captain Brown in a low voice, which I think Miss Jenkyns could not have heard.

"Dr. Johnson's style is a model for young beginners. My father recommended it to me when I began to write letters—I have formed my own style upon it; I recommend it to your favourite."

"I should be very sorry for him to exchange his style for any such pompous writing," said Captain Brown.

Miss Jenkyns felt this as a personal affront, in a way of which the Captain had not dreamed. Epistolary writing she and her friends considered as her *forte*. Many a copy of many a letter have I seen written and corrected on the slate, before she "seized the half-hour just previous to post-time to assure" her friends of this or of that; and Dr. Johnson was, as she said, her model in these compositions. She drew herself up with dignity, and only replied to Captain Brown's last remark by saying, with marked emphasis on every syllable, "I prefer Dr. Johnson to Mr. Boz."

It is said—I won't vouch for the fact—that Captain Brown was heard to say, *sotto voce*, "D—n Dr. Johnson!" If he did, he was penitent afterwards, as he showed by

going to stand near Miss Jenkyns's arm-chair, and endeavouring to beguile her into conversation on some more pleasing subject. But she was inexorable. The next day she made the remark I have mentioned about Miss Jessie's dimples.

CHAPTER II

THE CAPTAIN

It was impossible to live a month at Cranford and not know the daily habits of each resident; and long before my visit was ended I knew much concerning the whole Brown trio. There was nothing new to be discovered respecting their poverty; for they had spoken simply and openly about that from the very first. They made no mystery of the necessity for their being economical. All that remained to be discovered was the Captain's infinite kindness of heart, and the various modes in which, unconsciously to himself, he manifested it. Some little anecdotes were talked about for some time after they occurred. As we did not read much, and as all the ladies were pretty well suited with servants, there was a dearth of subjects for conversation. We therefore discussed the circumstance of the Captain taking a poor old woman's dinner out of her hands one very slippery Sunday. He had met her returning from the bakehouse as he came from church, and noticed her precarious footing; and, with the grave dignity with which he did everything, he relieved her of her burden, and steered along the street by her side, carrying her baked mutton and potatoes safely home. This was thought very eccentric; and it was rather expected that he would pay a round of calls, on the Monday morning, to explain and apologise to the Cranford sense of propriety: but he did no such thing: and then it was decided that

he was ashamed, and was keeping out of sight. In a kindly pity for him, we began to say, "After all, the Sunday morning's occurrence showed great goodness of heart, and it was resolved that he should be comforted on his next appearance amongst us; but, lo! he came down upon us, untouched by any sense of shame, speaking loud and bass as ever, his head thrown back, his wig as jaunty and well-curled as usual, and we were obliged to conclude he had forgotten all about Sunday.

Miss Pole and Miss Jessie Brown had set up a kind of intimacy on the strength of the Shetland wool and the new knitting stitches; so it happened that when I went to visit Miss Pole I saw more of the Browns than I had done while staying with Miss Jenkyns, who had never got over what she called Captain Brown's disparaging remarks upon Dr. Johnson as a writer of light and agreeable fiction. I found that Miss Brown was seriously ill of some lingering, incurable complaint, the pain occasioned by which gave the uneasy expression to her face that I had taken for unmitigated crossness. Cross, too, she was at times, when the nervous irritability occasioned by her disease became past endurance. Miss Jessie bore with her at these times, even more patiently than she did with the bitter self-upbraidings by which they were invariably succeeded. Miss Brown used to accuse herself, not merely of hasty and irritable temper, but also of being the cause why her father and sister were obliged to pinch, in order to allow her the small luxuries which were necessaries in her condition. She would so fain have made sacrifices for them, and have lightened their cares, that the original generosity of her disposition added acerbity to her temper. All this was borne by Miss Jessie and her father with more than placidity—with absolute tenderness. I forgave Miss Jessie her singing out of tune, and her juvenility of dress, when I saw her at home. I came to perceive that Captain Brown's dark Brutus wig and padded coat (alas! too often threadbare) were remnants of the military smartness of his youth, which he now wore unconsciously. He

was a man of infinite resources, gained in his barrack experience. As he confessed, no one could black his boots to please him except himself; but, indeed, he was not above saving the little maid-servant's labours in every way—knowing, most likely, that his daughter's illness made the place a hard one.

He endeavoured to make peace with Miss Jenkyns soon after the memorable dispute I have named, by a present of a wooden fire-shovel (his own making), having heard her say how much the grating of an iron one annoyed her. She received the present with cool gratitude, and thanked him formally. When he was gone, she bade me put it away in the lumber-room; feeling, probably, that no present from a man who preferred Mr. Boz to Dr. Johnson could be less jarring than an iron fire-shovel.

Such was the state of things when I left Cranford and went to Drumble. I had, however, several correspondents, who kept me *au fait* as to the proceedings of the dear little town. There was Miss Pole, who was becoming as much absorbed in crochet as she had been once in knitting, and the burden of whose letter was something like, "But don't you forget the white worsted at Flint's" of the old song; for at the end of every sentence of news came a fresh direction as to some crochet commission which I was to execute for her. Miss Matilda Jenkyns (who did not mind being called Miss Matty, when Miss Jenkyns was not by) wrote nice, kind, rambling letters, now and then venturing into an opinion of her own; but suddenly pulling herself up, and either begging me not to name what she had said, as Deborah thought differently, and *she* knew, or else putting in a postscript to the effect that, since writing the above, she had been talking over the subject with Deborah, and was quite convinced that, &c.—(here probably followed a recantation of every opinion she had given in the letter). Then came Miss Jenkyns—Debōrah, as she liked Miss Matty to call her, her father having once said that the Hebrew name ought to be so pronounced. I secretly think

she took the Hebrew prophetess for a model in character; and, indeed, she was not unlike the stern prophetess in some ways, making allowance, of course, for modern customs and difference in dress. Miss Jenkyns wore a cravat, and a little bonnet like a jockey-cap, and altogether had the appearance of a strong-minded woman; although she would have despised the modern idea of women being equal to men. Equal, indeed! she knew they were superior. But to return to her letters. Everything in them was stately and grand like herself. I have been looking them over (dear Miss Jenkyns, how I honoured her!), and I will give an extract, more especially because it relates to our friend Captain Brown:—

"The Honourable Mrs. Jamieson has only just quitted me; and, in the course of conversation, she communicated to me the intelligence that she had yesterday received a call from her revered husband's quondam friend, Lord Mauleverer. You will not easily conjecture what brought his lordship within the precincts of our little town. It was to see Captain Brown, with whom, it appears, his lordship was acquainted in the 'plumed wars,' and who had the privilege of averting destruction from his lordship's head when some great peril was impending over it, off the misnomered Cape of Good Hope. You know our friend the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson's deficiency in the spirit of innocent curiosity; and you will therefore not be so much surprised when I tell you she was quite unable to disclose to me the exact nature of the peril in question. I was anxious, I confess, to ascertain in what manner Captain Brown, with his limited establishment, could receive so distinguished a guest; and I discovered that his lordship retired to rest, and, let us hope, to refreshing slumbers, at the Angel Hotel; but shared the Brunonian meals during the two days that he honoured Cranford with his august presence. Mrs. Johnson, our civil butcher's wife, informs me that Miss Jessie purchased a leg of lamb; but, besides this, I can hear of no preparation whatever to give a suitable reception to so distinguished a visitor. Perhaps

they entertained him with 'the feast of reason and the flow of soul;' and to us, who are acquainted with Captain Brown's sad want of relish for 'the pure wells of English undefiled,' it may be matter for congratulation that he has had the opportunity of improving his taste by holding converse with an elegant and refined member of the British aristocracy. But from some mundane failings who is altogether free?"

Miss Pole and Miss Matty wrote to me by the same post. Such a piece of news as Lord Mauleverer's visit was not to be lost on the Cranford letter-writers: they made the most of it. Miss Matty humbly apologised for writing at the same time as her sister, who was so much more capable than she to describe the honour done to Cranford; but in spite of a little bad spelling, Miss Matty's account gave me the best idea of the commotion occasioned by his lordship's visit, after it had occurred; for, except the people at the Angel, the Browns, Mrs. Jamieson, and a little lad his lordship had sworn at for driving a dirty hoop against the aristocratic legs, I could not hear of any one with whom his lordship had held conversation.

My next visit to Cranford was in the summer. There had been neither births, deaths, nor marriages since I was there last. Everybody lived in the same house, and wore pretty nearly the same well-preserved, old-fashioned clothes. The greatest event was, that Miss Jenkynses had purchased a new carpet for the drawing-room. Oh, the busy work Miss Matty and I had in chasing the sunbeams, as they fell in an afternoon right down on this carpet through the blindless window! We spread newspapers over the places, and sat down to our book or our work; and, lo! in a quarter of an hour the sun had moved, and was blazing away on a fresh spot; and down again we went on our knees to alter the position of the newspapers. We were very busy, too, one whole morning, before Miss Jenkyns gave her party, in following her directions, and in cutting out and stitching together pieces of newspaper so as to form little paths to

every chair set for the expected visitors, lest their shoes might dirty or defile the purity of the carpet. Do you make paper paths for every guest to walk upon in London?

Captain Brown and Miss Jenkyns were not very cordial to each other. The literary dispute, of which I had seen the beginning, was a "raw," the slightest touch on which made them wince. It was the only difference of opinion they had ever had; but that difference was enough. Miss Jenkyns could not refrain from talking *at* Captain Brown; and, though he did not reply, he drummed with his fingers, which action she felt and resented as very disparaging to Dr. Johnson. He was rather ostentatious in his preference of the writings of Mr. Boz; would walk through the streets so absorbed in them that he all but ran against Miss Jenkyns; and though his apologies were earnest and sincere, and though he did not, in fact, do more than startle her and himself, she owned to me she had rather he had knocked her down, if he had only been reading a higher style of literature. The poor, brave Captain! he looked older, and more worn, and his clothes were very threadbare. But he seemed as bright and cheerful as ever, unless he was asked about his daughter's health.

"She suffers a great deal, and she must suffer more: we do what we can to alleviate her pain;—God's will be done!" He took off his hat at these last words. I found, from Miss Matty, that everything had been done, in fact. A medical man, of high repute in that country neighbourhood, had been sent for, and every injunction he had given was attended to, regardless of expense. Miss Matty was sure they denied themselves many things in order to make the invalid comfortable; but they never spoke about it; and as for Miss Jessie!—"I really think she's an angel," said poor Miss Matty, quite overcome. "To see her way of bearing with Miss Brown's crossness, and the bright face she puts on after she's been sitting up a whole night and scolded above half of it, is quite beautiful. Yet she looks as neat and as ready to welcome the Captain at breakfast-time as if she had

been asleep in the Queen's bed all night. My dear! you could never laugh at her prim little curls or her pink bows again if you saw her as I have done." I could only feel very penitent, and greet Miss Jessie with double respect when I met her next. She looked faded and pinched; and her lips began to quiver, as if she was very weak, when she spoke of her sister. But she brightened, and sent back the tears that were glittering in her pretty eyes, as she said—

"But, to be sure, what a town Cranford is for kindness! I don't suppose any one has a better dinner than usual cooked but the best part of all comes in a little covered basin for my sister. The poor people will leave their earliest vegetables at our door for her. They speak short and gruff, as if they were ashamed of it; but I am sure it often goes to my heart to see their thoughtfulness." The tears now came back and overflowed; but after a minute or two she began to scold herself, and ended by going away the same cheerful Miss Jessie as ever.

"But why does not this Lord Mauleverer do something for the man who saved his life?" said I.

"Why, you see, unless Captain Brown has some reason for it, he never speaks about being poor; and he walked along by his lordship looking as happy and cheerful as a prince; and as they never called attention to their dinner by apologies, and as Miss Brown was better that day, and all seemed bright, I dare say his lordship never knew how much care there was in the background. He did send game in the winter pretty often, but now he is gone abroad."

I had often occasion to notice the use that was made of fragments and small opportunities in Cranford; the rose-leaves that were gathered ere they fell to make into a pot-pourri for some one who had no garden; the little bundles of lavender flowers sent to strew the drawers of some town-dweller, or to burn in the chamber of some invalid. Things that many would despise, and actions which it seemed scarcely worth while to perform, were all attended to in Cranford. Miss Jenkyns stuck an apple full of cloves, to be

heated and smell pleasantly in Miss Brown's room; and as she put in each clove she uttered a Johnsonian sentence. Indeed, she never could think of the Browns without talking Johnson; and, as they were seldom absent from her thoughts just then, I heard many a rolling, three-piled sentence.

Captain Brown called one day to thank Miss Jenkyns for many little kindnesses, which I did not know until then that she had rendered. He had suddenly become like an old man; his deep bass voice had a quavering in it, his eyes looked dim, and the lines on his face were deep. He did not—could not—speak cheerfully of his daughter's state, but he talk with manly, pious resignation, and not much. Twice over he said, "What Jessie has been to us, God only knows!" and after the second time, he got up hastily, shook hands all round without speaking, and left the room.

That afternoon we perceived little groups in the street, all listening with faces aghast to some tale or other. Miss Jenkyns wondered what could be the matter for some time before she took the undignified step of sending Jenny out to inquire.

Jenny came back with a white face of terror. "Oh, ma'am! oh, Miss Jenkyns, ma'am! Captain Brown is killed by them nasty cruel railroads!" and she burst into tears. She, along with many others, had experienced the poor Captain's kindness.

"How?—where—where? Good God! Jenny, don't waste time in crying, but tell us something." Miss Matty rushed out into the street at once, and collared the man who was telling the tale.

"Come in—come to my sister at once, Miss Jenkyns, the rector's daughter. Oh, man, man! say it is not true," she cried, as she brought the affrighted carter, sleeking down his hair, into the drawing-room, where he stood with his wet boots on the new carpet, and no one regarded it.

"Please, mum, it is true. I seed it myself," and he shuddered at the recollection. "The Captain was a-reading some new book as he was deep in, a-waiting for the down

train; and there was a little lass as wanted to come to its mammy, and gave its sister the slip, and came toddling across the line. And he looked up sudden, at the sound of the train coming, and seed the child, and he darted on the line and cotched it up, and his foot slipped, and the train came over him in no time. O Lord, Lord! Mum, it's quite true—and they've come over to tell his daughters. The child's safe, though, with only a bang on its shoulder as he threw it to its mammy. Poor Captain would be glad of that, mum, wouldn't he? God bless him!" The great rough carter puckered up his manly face, and turned away to hide his tears. I turned to Miss Jenkyns. She looked very ill, as if she were going to faint, and signed to me to open the window.

"Matilda, bring me my bonnet. I must go to those girls. God pardon me, if ever I have spoken contemptuously to the Captain!"

Miss Jenkyns arrayed herself to go out, telling Miss Matilda to give the man a glass of wine. While she was away, Miss Matty and I huddled over the fire, talking in a low and awestruck voice. I know we cried quietly all the time.

Miss Jenkyns came home in a silent mood, and we durst not ask her many questions. She told us that Miss Jessie had fainted, and that she and Miss Pole had had some difficulty in bringing her round; but that, as soon as she recovered, she begged one of them to go and sit with her sister.

"Mr. Hoggins says she cannot live many days, and she shall be spared this shock," said Miss Jessie, shivering with feelings to which she dared not give way.

"But how can you manage, my dear?" asked Miss Jenkyns; "you cannot bear up, she must see your tears."

"God will help me—I will not give way—she was asleep when the news came; she may be asleep yet. She would be so utterly miserable, not merely at my father's death, but

to think of what would become of me; she is so good to me." She looked up earnestly in their faces with her soft true eyes, and Miss Pole told Miss Jenkyns afterwards she could hardly bear it, knowing, as she did, how Miss Brown treated her sister.

However, it was settled according to Miss Jessie's wish. Miss Brown was to be told her father had been summoned to take a short journey on railway business. They had managed it in some way—Miss Jenkyns could not exactly say how. Miss Pole was to stop with Miss Jessie. Mrs. Jamieson had sent to inquire. And this was all we heard that night; and a sorrowful night it was. The next day a full account of the fatal accident was in the county paper which Miss Jenkyns took in. Her eyes were very weak, she said, and she asked me to read it. When I came to the "gallant gentleman was deeply engaged in the perusal of a number of 'Pickwick,' which he had just received," Miss Jenkyns shook her head long and solemnly, and then sighed out, "Poor, dear, infatuated man!"

The corpse was to be taken from the station to the parish church, there to be interred. Miss Jessie had set her heart on following it to the grave; and no dissuasives could alter her resolve. Her restraint upon herself made her almost obstinate; she resisted all Miss Pole's entreaties and Miss Jenkyns's advice. At last Miss Jenkyns gave up the point; and after a silence, which I feared portended some deep displeasure against Miss Jessie, Miss Jenkyns said she should accompany the latter to the funeral.

"It is not fit for you to go alone. It would be against both propriety and humanity were I to allow it."

Miss Jessie seemed as if she did not half like this arrangement; but her obstinacy, if she had any, had been exhausted in her determination to go to the interment. She longed, poor thing, I have no doubt, to cry alone over the grave of the dear father to whom she had been all in all, and to give way, for one little half-hour, uninterrupted by sympathy and unobserved by friendship. But it was not to be. That

afternoon Miss Jenkyns sent out for a yard of black crape, and employed herself busily in trimming the little black silk bonnet I have spoken about. When it was finished she put it on, and looked at us for approbation—admiration she despised. I was full of sorrow, but, by one of those whimsical thoughts which come unbidden into our heads, in times of deepest grief, I no sooner saw the bonnet than I was reminded of a helmet; and in that hybrid bonnet, half helmet, half jockey-cap, did Miss Jenkyns attend Captain Brown's funeral, and, I believe, supported Miss Jessie with a tender, indulgent firmness which was invaluable, allowing her to weep her passionate fill before they left.

Miss Pole, Miss Matty, and I, meanwhile attended to Miss Brown: and hard work we found it to relieve her querulous and never-ending complaints. But if we were so weary and dispirited, what must Miss Jessie have been! Yet she came back almost calm, as if she had gained a new strength. She put off her mourning dress, and came in, looking pale and gentle, thanking us each with a soft long pressure of the hand. She could even smile—a faint, sweet, wintry smile—as if to reassure us of her power to endure; but her look made our eyes fill suddenly with tears, more than if she had cried outright.

It was settled that Miss Pole was to remain with her all the watching livelong night; and that Miss Matty and I were to return in the morning to relieve them, and give Miss Jessie the opportunity for a few hours of sleep. But when the morning came, Miss Jenkyns appeared at the breakfast-table, equipped in her helmet-bonnet, and ordered Miss Matty to stay at home, as she meant to go and help to nurse. She was evidently in a state of great friendly excitement, which she showed by eating her breakfast standing, and scolding the household all round.

No nursing—no energetic strong-minded woman could help Miss Brown now. There was that in the room as we entered which was stronger than us all, and made us shrink into solemn awestruck helplessness. Miss Brown was

dying. We hardly knew her voice, it was so devoid of the complaining tone we had always associated with it. Miss Jessie told me afterwards that it, and her face too, were just what they had been formerly, when her mother's death left her the young anxious head of the family, of whom only Miss Jessie survived.

She was conscious of her sister's presence, though not, I think, of ours. We stood a little behind the curtain: Miss Jessie knelt with her face near her sister's, in order to catch the last soft awful whispers.

"Oh, Jessie! Jessie! How selfish I have been! God forgive me for letting you sacrifice yourself for me as you did! I have so loved you—and yet I have thought only of myself. God forgive me!"

"Hush, love! hush!" said Miss Jessie, sobbing.

"And my father! my dear, dear father! I will not complain now, if God will give me strength to be patient. But, oh, Jessie! tell my father how I longed and yearned to see him at last, and to ask his forgiveness. He can never know now how I loved him—oh! if I might but tell him, before I die! What a life of sorrow his has been, and I have done so little to cheer him!"

A light came into Miss Jessie's face. "Would it comfort you, dearest, to think that he does know?—would it comfort you, love, to know that his cares, his sorrows"—— Her voice quivered, but she steadied it into calmness—"Mary! he has gone before you to the place where the weary are at rest. He knows now how you loved him."

A strange look, which was not distress, came over Miss Brown's face. She did not speak for some time, but then we saw her lips form the words, rather than heard the sound —"Father, mother, Harry, Archy;"—then, as if it were a new idea throwing a filmy shadow over her darkened mind—"But you will be alone, Jessie!"

Miss Jessie had been feeling this all during the silence, I think; for the tears rolled down her cheeks like rain, at these words, and she could not answer at first. Then she

put her hands together tight, and lifted them up, and said—but not to us—

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

In a few moments more Miss Brown lay calm and still—never to sorrow or murmur more.

After this second funeral, Miss Jenkyns insisted that Miss Jessie should come to stay with her rather than go back to the desolate house, which, in fact, we learned from Miss Jessie, must now be given up, as she had not wherewithal to maintain it. She had something above twenty pounds a year, besides the interest of the money for which the furniture would sell; but she could not live upon that: and so we talked over her qualifications for earning money.

"I can sew neatly," said she, "and I like nursing. I think, too, I could manage a house, if any one would try me as housekeeper; or I would go into a shop, as saleswoman, if they would have patience with me at first."

Miss Jenkyns declared, in an angry voice, that she should do no such thing; and talked to herself about "some people having no idea of their rank as a captain's daughter," nearly an hour afterwards, when she brought Miss Jessie up a basin of delicately-made arrowroot, and stood over her like a dragoon until the last spoonful was finished; then she disappeared. Miss Jessie began to tell me some more of the plans which had suggested themselves to her, and insensibly fell into talking of the days that were past and gone, and interested me so much I neither knew nor heeded how time passed. We were both startled when Miss Jenkyns reappeared, and caught us crying. I was afraid lest she would be displeased, as she often said that crying hindered digestion, and I knew she wanted Miss Jessie to get strong; but, instead, she looked queer and excited, and fidgeted round us without saying anything. At last she spoke.

"I have been so much startled—no, I've not been at all startled—don't mind me, my dear Miss Jessie—I've been very much surprised—in fact, I've had a caller, whom you knew once, my dear Miss Jessie" ——

Miss Jessie went very white, then flushed scarlet, and looked eagerly at Miss Jenkyns.

"A gentleman, my dear, who wants to know if you would see him."

"Is it?—it is not"—stammered out Miss Jessie—and got no farther.

"This is his card," said Miss Jenkyns, giving it to Miss Jessie; and while her head was bent over it, Miss Jenkyns went through a series of winks and odd faces to me, and formed her lips into a long sentence, of which, of course, I could not understand a word.

"May he come up?" asked Miss Jenkyns, at last.

"Oh, yes! certainly!" said Miss Jessie, as much as to say, this is your house, you may show any visitor where you like. She took up some knitting of Miss Matty's and began to be very busy, though I could see how she trembled all over.

Miss Jenkyns rang the bell, and told the servant who answered it to show Major Gordon upstairs; and, presently, in walked a tall, fine, frank-looking man of forty or upwards. He shook hands with Miss Jessie; but he could not see her eyes, she kept them so fixed on the ground. Miss Jenkyns asked me if I would come and help her to tie up the preserves in the store-room; and, though Miss Jessie plucked at my gown, and even looked up at me with begging eye, I durst not refuse to go where Miss Jenkyns asked. Instead of tying up preserves in the store-room, however, we went to talk in the dining-room; and there Miss Jenkyns told me what Major Gordon had told her; how he had served in the same regiment with Captain Brown, and had become acquainted with Miss Jessie, then a sweet-looking, blooming girl of eighteen; how the acquaintance had grown into love on his part, though it had been some years before he had spoken; how, on becoming possessed, through the will of an uncle, of a good estate in Scotland, he had offered and been refused, though with so much agitation and evident distress that he was sure she was not indifferent to him; and how

he had discovered that the obstacle was the fell disease which was, even then, too surely threatening her sister. She had mentioned that the surgeons foretold intense suffering; and there was no one but herself to nurse her poor Mary, or cheer and comfort her father during the time of illness. They had had long discussions; and on her refusal to pledge herself to him as his wife when all should be over, he had grown angry, and broken off entirely, and gone abroad, believing that she was a cold-hearted person whom he would do well to forget. He had been travelling in the East, and was on his return home when, at Rome, he saw the account of Captain Brown's death in *Galignani*.

Just then Miss Matty, who had been out all the morning, and had only lately returned to the house, burst in with a face of dismay and outraged propriety.

"Oh, goodness me!" she said. "Deborah, there's a gentleman sitting in the drawing-room with his arm round Miss Jessie's waist!" Miss Matty's eyes looked large with terror.

Miss Jenkyns snubbed her down in an instant.

"The most proper place in the world for his arm to be in. Go away, Matilda, and mind your own business." This from her sister, who had hitherto been a model of feminine decorum, was a blow for poor Miss Matty, and with a double shock she left the room.

The last time I ever saw poor Miss Jenkyns was many years after this. Mrs. Gordon had kept up a warm and affectionate intercourse with all at Cranford. Miss Jenkyns, Miss Matty, and Miss Pole had all been to visit her, and returned with wonderful accounts of her house, her husband, her dress, and her looks. For, with happiness, something of her early bloom returned; she had been a year or two younger than we had taken her for. Her eyes were always lovely, and, as Mrs. Gordon, her dimples were not out of place. At the time to which I have referred, when I last saw Miss Jenkyns, that lady was old and feeble, and had lost something of her strong mind. Little Flora Gordon was staying

with the Misses Jenkyns, and when I came in she was reading aloud to Miss Jenkyns, who lay feeble and changed on the sofa. Flora put down the *Rambler* when I came in.

"Ah!" said Miss Jenkyns, "you find me changed, my dear. I can't see as I used to do. If Flora were not here to read to me, I hardly know how I should get through the day. Did you ever read the *Rambler?* It's a wonderful book—wonderful! and the most improving reading for Flora" (which I dare say it would have been, if she could have read half the words without spelling, and could have understood the meaning of a third), "better than that strange old book, with the queer name, poor Captain Brown was killed for reading—that book by Mr. Boz, you know—'Old Poz'; when I was a girl—but that's a long time ago—I acted Lucy in 'Old Poz.'" She babbled on long enough for Flora to get a good long spell at the "Christmas Carol," which Miss Matty had left on the table.

CHAPTER III

A LOVE AFFAIR OF LONG AGO

I THOUGHT that probably my connection with Cranford would cease after Miss Jenkyns's death; at least, that it would have to be kept up by correspondence, which bears much the same relation to personal intercourse that the books of dried plants I sometimes see ("Hortus Siccus," I think they call the thing) do to the living and fresh flowers in the lanes and meadows. I was pleasantly surprised, therefore, by receiving a letter from Miss Pole (who had always come in for a supplementary week after my annual visit to Miss Jenkyns) proposing that I should go and stay with her; and then, in a couple of days after my acceptance, came a note from Miss

Matty, in which, in a rather circuitous and very humble manner, she told me how much pleasure I should confer if I could spend a week or two with her, either before or after I had been at Miss Pole's; "for," she said, "since my dear sister's death I am well aware I have no attractions to offer; it is only to the kindness of my friends that I can owe their company."

Of course I promised to come to dear Miss Matty as soon as I had ended my visit to Miss Pole; and the day after my arrival at Cranford I went to see her, much wondering what the house would be like without Miss Jenkyns, and rather dreading the changed aspect of things. Miss Matty began to cry as soon as she saw me. She was evidently nervous from having anticipated my call. I comforted her as well as I could; and I found the best consolation I could give was the honest praise that came from my heart as I spoke of the deceased. Miss Matty slowly shook her head over each virtue as it was named and attributed to her sister; and at last she could not restrain the tears which had long been silently flowing, but hid her face behind her handkerchief and sobbed aloud.

"Dear Miss Matty," said I, taking her hand—for indeed I did not know in what way to tell her how sorry I was for her, left deserted in the world. She put down her handkerchief and said—

"My dear, I'd rather you did not call me Matty. *She* did not like it; but I did many a thing she did not like, I'm afraid—and now she's gone! If you please, my love, will you call me Matilda?"

I promised faithfully, and began to practise the new name with Miss Pole that very day; and, by degrees, Miss Matilda's feeling on the subject was known through Cranford, and we all tried to drop the more familiar name, but with so little success that by-and-by we gave up the attempt.

My visit to Miss Pole was very quiet. Miss Jenkyns had so long taken the lead in Cranford that, now she was gone, they hardly knew how to give a party. The Honourable

Mrs. Jamieson, to whom Miss Jenkyns herself had always yielded the post of honour, was fat and inert, and very much at the mercy of her old servants. If they chose that she should give a party, they reminded her of the necessity for so doing; if not, she let it alone. There was all the more time for me to hear old-world stories from Miss Pole, while she sat knitting, and I making my father's shirts. I always took a quantity of plain sewing to Cranford; for, as we did not read much, or walk much, I found it a capital time to get through my work. One of Miss Pole's stories related to a shadow of a love affair that was dimly perceived or suspected long years before.

Presently, the time arrived when I was to remove to Miss Matilda's house. I found her timid and anxious about the arrangements for my comfort. Many a time, while I was unpacking, did she come backwards and forwards to stir the fire, which burned all the worse for being so frequently poked.

"Have you drawers enough, dear?" asked she. "I don't know exactly how my sister used to arrange them. She had capital methods. I am sure she would have trained a servant in a week to make a better fire than this, and Fanny has been with me four months."

This subject of servants was a standing grievance, and I could not wonder much at it; for, if gentlemen were scarce, and almost unheard of in the "genteel society" of Cranford, they or their counterparts—handsome young men—abounded in the lower classes. The pretty neat servant-maids had their choice of desirable "followers;" and their mistresses, without having the sort of mysterious dread of men and matrimony that Miss Matilda had, might well feel a little anxious lest the heads of their comely maids should be turned by the joiner, or the butcher, or the gardener, who were obliged, by their callings, to come to the house, and who, as ill-luck would have it, were generally handsome and unmarried. Fanny's lovers, if she had any—and Miss Matilda suspected her of so many flirtations that, if she had

not been very pretty, I should have doubted her having one —were a constant anxiety to her mistress. She was forbidden, by the articles of her engagement, to have "followers;" and though she had answered, innocently enough, doubling up the hem of her apron as she spoke, "Please, ma'am, I never had more than one at a time," Miss Matty prohibited that one. But a vision of a man seemed to haunt the kitchen. Fanny assured me that it was all fancy, or else I should have said myself that I had seen a man's coat-tails whisk into the scullery once, when I went on an errand into the store-room at night; and another evening, when, our watches having stopped, I went to look at the clock, there was a very odd appearance, singularly like a young man squeezed up between the clock and the back of the open kitchen-door; and I thought Fanny snatched up the candle very hastily, so as to throw the shadow on the clock face, while she very positively told me the time half-an-hour too early, as we found out afterwards by the church clock. But I did not add to Miss Matty's anxieties by naming my suspicions, especially as Fanny said to me, the next day, that it was such a queer kitchen for having odd shadows about it, she really was almost afraid to stay; "for you know, miss," she added, "I don't see a creature from six o'clock tea, till Missus rings the bell for prayers at ten."

However, it so fell out that Fanny had to leave; and Miss Matilda begged me to stay and "settle her" with the new maid; to which I consented, after I had heard from my father that he did not want me at home. The new servant was a rough, honest-looking, country girl, who had only lived in a farm place before; but I liked her looks when she came to be hired; and I promised Miss Matilda to put her in the ways of the house. The said ways were religiously such as Miss Matilda thought her sister would approve. Many a domestic rule and regulation had been a subject of plaintive whispered murmur to me during Miss Jenkyns's life; but now that she was gone, I do not think that even I, who was a favourite, durst have suggested an alteration. To give an

instance: we constantly adhered to the forms which were observed, at meal-times, in "my father, the rector's house." Accordingly, we had always wine and dessert; but the decanters were only filled when there was a party, and what remained was seldom touched, though we had two wine-glasses apiece every day after dinner, until the next festive occasion arrived, when the state of the remainder wine was examined into in a family council. The dregs were often given to the poor: but occasionally, when a good deal had been left at the last party (five months ago, it might be), it was added to some of a fresh bottle, brought up from the cellar. I fancy poor Captain Brown did not much like wine, for I noticed he never finished his first glass, and most military men take several. Then, as to our dessert, Miss Jenkyns used to gather currants and gooseberries for it herself, which I sometimes thought would have tasted better fresh from the trees; but then, as Miss Jenkyns observed, there would have been nothing for dessert in summer-time. As it was, we felt very genteel with our two glasses apiece, and a dish of gooseberries at the top, of currants and biscuits at the sides, and two decanters at the bottom. When oranges came in, a curious proceeding was gone through. Miss Jenkyns did not like to cut the fruit; for, as she observed, the juice all ran out nobody knew where; sucking (only I think she used some more recondite word) was in fact the only way of enjoying oranges; but then there was the unpleasant association with a ceremony frequently gone through by little babies; and so, after dessert, in orange season, Miss Jenkyns and Miss Matty used to rise up, possess themselves each of an orange in silence, and withdraw to the privacy of their own rooms to indulge in sucking oranges.

I had once or twice tried, on such occasions, to prevail on Miss Matty to stay, and had succeeded in her sister's life-time. I held up a screen, and did not look, and, as she said, she tried not to make the noise very offensive; but now that she was left alone, she seemed quite horrified when I begged her to remain with me in the warm dining-parlour, and

enjoy her orange as she liked best. And so it was in everything. Miss Jenkyns's rules were made more stringent than ever, because the framer of them was gone where there could be no appeal. In all things else Miss Matilda was meek and undecided to a fault. I have heard Fanny turn her round twenty times in a morning about dinner, just as the little hussy chose; and I sometimes fancied she worked on Miss Matilda's weakness in order to bewilder her, and to make her feel more in the power of her clever servant. I determined that I would not leave her till I had seen what sort of a person Martha was; and, if I found her trustworthy, I would tell her not to trouble her mistress with every little decision.

Martha was blunt and plain-spoken to a fault; otherwise she was a brisk, well-meaning, but very ignorant girl. She had not been with us a week before Miss Matilda and I were astounded one morning by the receipt of a letter from a cousin of hers, who had been twenty or thirty years in India, and who had lately, as we had seen by the "Army List," returned to England, bringing with him an invalid wife who had never been introduced to her English relations. Major Jenkyns wrote to propose that he and his wife should spend a night at Cranford, on his way to Scotland—at the inn, if it did not suit Miss Matilda to receive them into her house; in which case they should hope to be with her as much as possible during the day. Of course it *must* suit her, as she said; for all Cranford knew that she had her sister's bedroom at liberty; but I am sure she wished the Major had stopped in India and forgotten his cousins out and out.

"Oh! how must I manage?" asked she helplessly. "If Deborah had been alive she would have known what to do with a gentleman-visitor. Must I put razors in his dressing-room? Dear! dear! and I've got none. Deborah would have had them. And slippers, and coat-brushes?" I suggested that probably he would bring all these things with him. "And after dinner, how am I to know when to get up and leave him to his wine? Deborah would have done

it so well; she would have been quite in her element. Will he want coffee, do you think?" I undertook the management of the coffee, and told her I would instruct Martha in the art of waiting—in which it must be owned she was terribly deficient—and that I had no doubt Major and Mrs. Jenkyns would understand the quiet mode in which a lady lived by herself in a country town. But she was sadly fluttered. I made her empty her decanters and bring up two fresh bottles of wine. I wished I could have prevented her from being present at my instructions to Martha, for she frequently cut in with some fresh direction, muddling the poor girl's mind, as she stood open-mouthed, listening to us both.

"Hand the vegetables round," said I (foolishly, I see now—for it was aiming at more than we could accomplish with quietness and simplicity); and then, seeing her look bewildered, I added, "take the vegetables round to people, and let them help themselves."

"And mind you go first to the ladies," put in Miss Matilda. "Always go to the ladies before gentlemen when you are waiting."

"I'll do it as you tell me, ma'am," said Martha; "but I like lads best."

We felt very uncomfortable and shocked at this speech of Martha's, yet I don't think she meant any harm; and, on the whole, she attended very well to our directions, except that she "nudged" the Major when he did not help himself as soon as she expected to the potatoes, while she was handing them round.

The Major and his wife were quiet, unpretending people enough when they did come; languid, as all East Indians are, I suppose. We were rather dismayed at their bringing two servants with them, a Hindoo body-servant for the Major, and a steady elderly maid for his wife: but they slept at the inn, and took off a good deal of the responsibility by attending carefully to their master's and mistress's comfort. Martha, to be sure, had never ended her staring at the East Indian's white turban and brown complexion,

and I saw that Miss Matilda shrunk away from him a little as he waited at dinner. Indeed, she asked me, when they were gone, if he did not remind me of Blue Beard? On the whole, the visit was most satisfactory, and is a subject of conversation even now with Miss Matilda; at the time it greatly excited Cranford, and even stirred up the apathetic and Honourable Mrs. Jamieson to some expression of interest, when I went to call and thank her for the kind answers she had vouchsafed to Miss Matilda's inquiries as to the arrangement of a gentleman's dressing-room—answers which I must confess she had given in the wearied manner of the Scandinavian prophetess—

"Leave me, leave me to repose."

And *now* I come to the love affair.

It seems that Miss Pole had a cousin, once or twice removed, who had offered to Miss Matty long ago. Now this cousin lived four or five miles from Cranford on his own estate; but his property was not large enough to entitle him to rank higher than a yeoman; or rather, with something of the "pride which apes humility," he had refused to push himself on, as so many of his class had done, into the ranks of the squires. He would not allow himself to be called Thomas Holbrook, *Esq.*; he even sent back letters with this address, telling the postmistress at Cranford that his name was *Mr.* Thomas Holbrook, yeoman. He rejected all domestic innovations; he would have the house door stand open in summer and shut in winter, without knocker or bell to summon a servant. The closed fist or the knob of the stick did this office for him if he found the door locked. He despised every refinement which had not its root deep down in humanity. If people were not ill, he saw no necessity for moderating his voice. He spoke the dialect of the country in perfection, and constantly used it in conversation; although Miss Pole (who gave me these particulars) added, that he read aloud more beautifully and with more feeling than any one she had ever heard, except the late rector.

"And how came Miss Matilda not to marry him?" asked I.

"Oh, I don't know. She was willing enough, I think; but you know Cousin Thomas would not have been enough of a gentleman for the rector and Miss Jenkyns."

"Well! but they were not to marry him," said I impatiently.

"No; but they did not like Miss Matty to marry below her rank. You know she was the rector's daughter, and somehow they are related to Sir Peter Arley: Miss Jenkyns thought a deal of that."

"Poor Miss Matty!" said I.

"Nay, now, I don't know anything more than that he offered and was refused. Miss Matty might not like him—and Miss Jenkyns might never have said a word—it is only a guess of mine."

"Has she never seen him since?" I inquired.

"No, I think not. You see, Woodley, Cousin Thomas's house, lies half-way between Cranford and Misselton; and I know he made Misselton his market-town very soon after he had offered to Miss Matty; and I don't think he has been into Cranford above once or twice since—once, when I was walking with Miss Matty, in High Street, and suddenly she darted from me, and went up Shire Lane. A few minutes after I was startled by meeting Cousin Thomas."

"How old is he?" I asked, after a pause of castle-building.

"He must be about seventy, I think, my dear," said Miss Pole, blowing up my castle, as if by gunpowder, into small fragments.

Very soon after—at least during my long visit to Miss Matilda—I had the opportunity of seeing Mr. Holbrook; seeing, too, his first encounter with his former love, after thirty or forty years' separation. I was helping to decide whether any of the new assortment of coloured silks which they had just received at the shop would do to match a grey and black mousseline-de-laine that wanted a new breadth,

when a tall, thin, Don Quixote-looking old man came into the shop for some woollen gloves. I had never seen the person (who was rather striking) before, and I watched him rather attentively while Miss Matty listened to the shopman. The stranger wore a blue coat with brass buttons, drab breeches, and gaiters, and drummed with his fingers on the counter until he was attended to. When he answered the shop-boy's question, "What can I have the pleasure of showing you to-day, sir?" I saw Miss Matilda start, and then suddenly sit down; and instantly I guessed who it was. She had made some inquiry which had to be carried round to the other shopman.

"Miss Jenkyns wants the black sarsenet two-and-two-pence the yard;" and Mr. Holbrook had caught the name, and was across the shop in two strides.

"Matty—Miss Matilda—Miss Jenkyns! God bless my soul! I should not have known you. How are you? how are you?" He kept shaking her hand in a way which proved the warmth of his friendship; but he repeated so often, as if to himself, "I should not have known you!" that any sentimental romance which I might be inclined to build was quite done away with by his manner.

However, he kept talking to us all the time we were in the shop; and then, waving the shopman with the unpurchased gloves on one side, with "Another time, sir! another time!" he walked home with us. I am happy to say my client, Miss Matilda, also left the shop in an equally bewildered state, not having purchased either green or red silk. Mr. Holbrook was evidently full with honest loud-spoken joy at seeing his old love again; he touched on the changes that had taken place; he even spoke of Miss Jenkyns as "Your poor sister! Well, well! we have all our faults;" and bade us good-bye with many a hope that he should soon see Miss Matty again. She went straight to her room, and never came back till our early tea-time, when I thought she looked as if she had been crying.

CHAPTER IV

A VISIT TO AN OLD BACHELOR

A FEW days after, a note came from Mr. Holbrook, asking us—impartially asking both of us—in a formal, old-fashioned style, to spend a day at his house—a long June day—for it was June now. He named that he had also invited his cousin, Miss Pole; so that we might join in a fly, which could be put up at his house.

I expected Miss Matty to jump at this invitation; but, no! Miss Pole and I had the greatest difficulty in persuading her to go. She thought it was improper; and was even half annoyed when we utterly ignored the idea of any impropriety in her going with two other ladies to see her old lover. Then came a more serious difficulty. She did not think Deborah would have liked her to go. This took us half a day's good hard talking to get over; but, at the first sentence of relenting, I seized the opportunity, and wrote and despatched an acceptance in her name—fixing day and hour, that all might be decided and done with.

The next morning she asked me if I would go down to the shop with her; and there, after much hesitation, we chose out three caps to be sent home and tried on, that the most becoming might be selected to take with us on Thursday.

She was in a state of silent agitation all the way to Woodley. She had evidently never been there before; and, although she little dreamt I knew anything of her early story, I could perceive she was in a tremor at the thought of seeing the place which might have been her home, and round which it is probable that many of her innocent girlish imaginations had clustered. It was a long drive there, through paved jolting lanes. Miss Matilda sat bolt upright, and looked wistfully out of the windows as we drew near the

end of our journey. The aspect of the country was quiet and pastoral. Woodley stood among fields; and there was an old-fashioned garden where roses and currant-bushes touched each other, and where the feathery asparagus formed a pretty background to the pinks and gilly-flowers; there was no drive up to the door. We got out at a little gate, and walked up a straight box-edged path.

"My cousin might make a drive, I think," said Miss Pole, who was afraid of earache, and had only her cap on.

"I think it is very pretty," said Miss Matty, with a soft plaintiveness in her voice, and almost in a whisper, for just then Mr. Holbrook appeared at the door, rubbing his hands in very effervescence of hospitality. He looked more like my idea of Don Quixote than ever, and yet the likeness was only external. His respectable housekeeper stood modestly at the door to bid us welcome; and, while she led the elder ladies upstairs to a bedroom, I begged to look about the garden. My request evidently pleased the old gentleman, who took me all round the place and showed me his six-and-twenty cows, named after the different letters of the alphabet. As we went along, he surprised me occasionally by repeating apt and beautiful quotations from the poets, ranging easily from Shakespeare and George Herbert to those of our own day. He did this as naturally as if he were thinking aloud, and their true and beautiful words were the best expression he could find for what he was thinking or feeling. To be sure he called Byron "my Lord Byrron," and pronounced the name of Goethe strictly in accordance with the English sound of the letters—"As Goethe says, 'Ye ever-verdant palaces,'" &c. Altogether, I never met with a man, before or since, who had spent so long a life in a secluded and not impressive country, with ever-increasing delight in the daily and yearly change of season and beauty.

When he and I went in, we found that dinner was nearly ready in the kitchen—for so I suppose the room ought to be called, as there were oak dressers and cupboards all round, all over by the side of the fire-place, and only a small Turkey

carpet in the middle of the flag-floor. The room might have been easily made into a handsome dark oak dining-parlour by removing the oven and a few other appurtenances of a kitchen, which were evidently never used, the real cooking-place being at some distance. The room in which we were expected to sit was a stiffly-furnished, ugly apartment; but that in which we did sit was what Mr. Holbrook called the counting-house, when he paid his labourers their weekly wages at a great desk near the door. The rest of the pretty sitting-room—looking into the orchard, and all covered over with dancing tree-shadows—was filled with books. They lay on the ground, they covered the walls, they strewed the table. He was evidently half ashamed and half proud of his extravagance in this respect. They were of all kinds—poetry and wild weird tales prevailing. He evidently chose his books in accordance with his own tastes, not because such and such were classical or established favourites.

"Ah!" he said, "we farmers ought not to have much time for reading; yet somehow one can't help it."

"What a pretty room!" said Miss Matty, *sotto voce*.

"What a pleasant place!" said I, aloud, almost simultaneously.

"Nay! if you like it," replied he; "but can you sit on these great, black leather, three-cornered chairs? I like it better than the best parlour; but I thought ladies would take that for the smarter place."

It was the smarter place, but, like most smart things, not at all pretty, or pleasant, or home-like; so, while we were at dinner, the servant-girl dusted and scrubbed the counting-house chairs, and we sat there all the rest of the day.

We had pudding before meat; and I thought Mr. Holbrook was going to make some apology for his old-fashioned ways, for he began—

"I don't know whether you like new-fangled ways."

"Oh, not at all!" said Miss Matty.

"No more do I," said he. "My housekeeper *will* have these in her new fashion; or else I tell her that, when I was

a young man, we used to keep strictly to my father's rule, 'No broth, no ball; no ball, no beef;' and always began dinner with broth. Then we had suet puddings, boiled in the broth with the beef; and then the meat itself. If we did not sup our broth, we had no ball, which we liked a deal better; and the beef came last of all, and only those had it who had done justice to the broth and the ball. Now folks begin with sweet things, and turn their dinners topsy-turvy."

When the ducks and green peas came, we looked at each other in dismay; we had only two-pronged, black-handled forks. It is true the steel was as bright as silver; but what were we to do? Miss Matty picked up her peas, one by one, on the point of the prongs, much as Aminé ate her grains of rice after her previous feast with the Ghoul. Miss Pole sighed over her delicate young peas as she left them on one side of her plate untasted, for they *would* drop between the prongs. I looked at my host: the peas were going wholesale into his capacious mouth, shovelled up by his large, round-ended knife. I saw, I imitated, I survived! My friends, in spite of my precedent, could not muster up courage enough to do an ungenteel thing; and, if Mr. Holbrook had not been so heartily hungry, he would probably have seen that the good peas went away almost untouched.

After dinner, a clay pipe was brought in, and a spittoon; and, asking us to retire to another room, where he would soon join us, if we disliked tobacco-smoke, he presented his pipe to Miss Matty, and requested her to fill the bowl. This was a compliment to a lady in his youth; but it was rather inappropriate to propose it as an honour to Miss Matty, who had been trained by her sister to hold smoking of every kind in utter abhorrence. But, if it was a shock to her refinement, it was also a gratification to her feelings to be thus selected; so she daintily stuffed the strong tobacco into the pipe, and then we withdrew.

"It is very pleasant dining with a bachelor," said Miss

Matty softly, as we settled ourselves in the counting-house. "I only hope it is not improper; so many pleasant things are!"

"What a number of books he has!" said Miss Pole, looking round the room. "And how dusty they are!"

"I think it must be like one of the great Dr. Johnson's rooms," said Miss Matty. "What a superior man your cousin must be!"

"Yes!" said Miss Pole, "he's a great reader; but I am afraid he has got into very uncouth habits with living alone."

"Oh! uncouth is too hard a word. I should call him eccentric; very clever people always are!" replied Miss Matty.

When Mr. Holbrook returned, he proposed a walk in the fields; but the two elder ladies were afraid of damp, and dirt, and had only very unbecoming calashes to put on over their caps; so they declined, and I was again his companion in a turn which he said he was obliged to take to see after his men. He strode along, either wholly forgetting my existence, or soothed into silence by his pipe—and yet it was not silence exactly. He walked before me with a stooping gait, his hands clasped behind him; and, as some tree or cloud, or glimpse of distant upland pastures, struck him, he quoted poetry to himself, saying it out loud in a grand, sonorous voice, with just the emphasis that true feeling and appreciation give. We came upon an old cedar tree, which stood at one end of the house—

"The cedar spreads his dark-green layers of shade."

"Capital term—'layers!' Wonderful man!" I did not know whether he was speaking to me or not; but I put in an assenting "wonderful," although I knew nothing about it, just because I was tired of being forgotten, and of being consequently silent.

He turned sharp round. "Ay! you may say 'wonderful.' Why, when I saw the review of his poems in *Blackwood*,

I set off within an hour, and walked seven miles to Misselton (for the horses were not in the way) and ordered them. Now, what colour are ashbuds in March?"

Is the man going mad? thought I. He is very like Don Quixote.

"What colour are they, I say?" repeated he vehemently.

"I am sure I don't know, sir," said I, with the meekness of ignorance.

"I knew you didn't. No more did I—an old fool that I am!—till this young man comes and tells me. Black as ash-buds in March. And I've lived all my life in the country; more shame for me not to know. Black: they are jet-black, madam." And he went off again, swinging along to the music of some rhyme he had got hold of.

When we came back, nothing would serve him but he must read us the poems he had been speaking of; and Miss Pole encouraged him in his proposal, I thought, because she wished me to hear his beautiful reading, of which she had boasted; but she afterwards said it was because she had got to a difficult part of her crochet, and wanted to count her stitches without having to talk. Whatever he had proposed would have been right to Miss Matty; although she did fall sound asleep within five minutes after he had begun a long poem, called 'Locksley Hall,' and had a comfortable nap, unobserved, till he ended; when the cessation of his voice wakened her up, and she said, feeling that something was expected, and that Miss Pole was counting—

"What a pretty book!"

"Pretty, madam! it's beautiful! Pretty, indeed!"

"Oh yes! I meant beautiful!" said she, fluttered at his disapproval of her word. "It is so like that beautiful poem of Dr. Johnson's my sister used to read—I forget the name of it; what was it, my dear?" turning to me.

"Which do you mean, ma'am? What was it about?"

"I don't remember what it was about, and I've quite forgotten what the name of it was; but it was written by

Dr. Johnson, and was very beautiful, and very like what Mr. Holbrook has just been reading."

"I don't remember it," said he reflectively. "But I don't know Dr. Johnson's poems well. I must read them."

As we were getting into the fly to return, I heard Mr. Holbrook say he should call on the ladies soon, and inquire how they got home; and this evidently pleased and fluttered Miss Matty at the time he said it; but after we had lost sight of the old house among the trees her sentiments towards the master of it were gradually absorbed into a distressing wonder as to whether Martha had broken her word, and seized on the opportunity of her mistress's absence to have a "follower." Martha looked good, and steady, and composed enough, as she came to help us out; she was always careful of Miss Matty, and to-night she made use of this unlucky speech—

"Eh! dear ma'am, to think of your going out in an evening in such a thin shawl! It's no better than muslin. At your age, ma'am, you should be careful."

"My age!" said Miss Matty, almost speaking crossly, for her, for she was usually gentle—"My age! Why, how old do you think I am, that you talk about my age?"

"Well, ma'am, I should say you were not far short of sixty; but folks' looks is often against them—and I'm sure I meant no harm."

"Martha, I'm not yet fifty-two!" said Miss Matty, with grave emphasis; for probably the remembrance of her youth had come very vividly before her this day, and she was annoyed at finding that golden time so far away in the past.

But she never spoke of any former and more intimate acquaintance with Mr. Holbrook. She had probably met with so little sympathy in her early love, that she had shut it up close in her heart; and it was only by a sort of watching, which I could hardly avoid since Miss Pole's confidence, that I saw how faithful her poor heart had been in its sorrow and its silence.

She gave me some good reason for wearing her best cap

every day, and sat near the window, in spite of her rheumatism, in order to see, without being seen, down into the street.

He came. He put his open palms upon his knees, which were far apart, as he sat with his head bent down, whistling, after we had replied to his inquiries about our safe return. Suddenly he jumped up—

"Well, madam! have you any commands for Paris? I am going there in a week or two."

"To Paris!" we both exclaimed.

"Yes, madam! I've never been there, and always had a wish to go; and I think, if I don't go soon, I mayn't go at all; so as soon as the hay is got in I shall go, before harvest time."

We were so much astonished that we had no commissions.

Just as he was going out of the room, he turned back, with his favourite exclamation—

"God bless my soul, madam! but I nearly forgot half my errand. Here are the poems for you you admired so much the other evening at my house." He tugged away at a parcel in his coat-pocket. "Good-bye, miss," said he; "good-bye, Matty! take care of yourself." And he was gone. But he had given her a book, and he had called her Matty, just as he used to do thirty years ago.

"I wish he would not go to Paris," said Miss Matilda anxiously. "I don't believe frogs will agree with him; he used to have to be very careful what he ate, which was curious in so strong-looking a young man."

Soon after this I took my leave, giving many an injunction to Martha to look after her mistress, and to let me know if she thought that Miss Matilda was not so well; in which case I would volunteer a visit to my old friend, without noticing Martha's intelligence to her.

Accordingly I received a line or two from Martha every now and then; and, about November, I had a note to say her mistress was "very low and sadly off her food;" and the account made me so uneasy that, although Martha did

not decidedly summon me, I packed up my things and went.

I received a warm welcome, in spite of the little flurry produced by an impromptu visit, for I had only been able to give a day's notice. Miss Matilda looked miserably ill; and I prepared to comfort and cosset her.

I went down to have a private talk with Martha.

"How long has your mistress been so poorly?" I asked, as I stood by the kitchen fire.

"Well! I think it's better than a fortnight; it is, I know; it was one Tuesday, after Miss Pole had been, that she went into this moping way. I thought she was tired, and it would go off with a night's rest; but no! she has gone on and on ever since, till I thought it my duty to write to you, ma'am."

"You did quite right, Martha. It is a comfort to think she has so faithful a servant about her. And I hope you find your place comfortable?"

"Well, ma'am, missus is very kind, and there's plenty to eat and drink, and no more work but what I can do easily —but"—— Martha hesitated.

"But what, Martha?"

"Why, it seems so hard of missus not to let me have any followers; there's such lots of young fellows in the town; and many a one has as much as offered to keep company with me; and I may never be in such a likely place again, and it's like wasting an opportunity. Many a girl as I know would have 'em unbeknownst to missus; but I've given my word, and I'll stick to it; or else this is just the house for missus never to be the wiser if they did come; and it's such a capable kitchen—there's such good dark corners in it —I'd be bound to hide any one. I counted up last Sunday night—for I'll not deny I was crying because I had to shut the door in Jem Hearn's face, and he's a steady young man, fit for any girl; only I had given missus my word." Martha was all but crying again; and I had little comfort to give her, for I knew, from old experience, of the horror with which both the Miss Jenkynses looked upon "followers";

and in Miss Matty's present nervous state this dread was not likely to be lessened.

I went to see Miss Pole the next day, and took her completely by surprise, for she had not been to see Miss Matilda for two days.

"And now I must go back with you, my dear, for I promised to let her know how Thomas Holbrook went on; and, I'm sorry to say, his housekeeper has sent me word to-day that he hasn't long to live. Poor Thomas! that journey to Paris was quite too much for him. His housekeeper says he has hardly ever been round his fields since, but just sits with his hands on his knees in the counting-house, not reading or anything, but only saying what a wonderful city Paris was! Paris has much to answer for if it's killed my cousin Thomas, for a better man never lived."

"Does Miss Matilda know of his illness?" asked I—a new light as to the cause of her indisposition dawning upon me.

"Dear! to be sure, yes! Has not she told you? I let her know a fortnight ago, or more, when first I heard of it. How odd she shouldn't have told you!"

Not at all, I thought; but I did not say anything. I felt almost guilty of having spied too curiously into that tender heart, and I was not going to speak of its secrets—hidden, Miss Matty believed, from all the world. I ushered Miss Pole into Miss Matilda's little drawing-room, and then left them alone. But I was not surprised when Martha came to my bedroom door, to ask me to go down to dinner alone, for that missus had one of her bad headaches. She came into the drawing-room at tea-time, but it was evidently an effort to her; and, as if to make up for some reproachful feeling against her late sister, Miss Jenkyns, which had been troubling her all the afternoon, and for which she now felt penitent, she kept telling me how good and how clever Deborah was in her youth; how she used to settle what gowns they were to wear at all the parties (faint, ghostly ideas of grim parties, far away in the distance, when Miss

Matty and Miss Pole were young!); and how Deborah and her mother had started the benefit society for the poor, and taught girls cooking and plain sewing; and how Deborah had once danced with a lord; and how she used to visit at Sir Peter Arley's, and try to remodel the quiet rectory establishment on the plans of Arley Hall, where they kept thirty servants; and how she had nursed Miss Matty through a long, long illness, of which I had never heard before, but which I now dated in my own mind as following the dismissal of the suit of Mr. Holbrook. So we talked softly and quietly of old times through the long November evening.

The next day Miss Pole brought us word that Mr. Holbrook was dead. Miss Matty heard the news in silence; in fact, from the account of the previous day, it was only what we had to expect. Miss Pole kept calling upon us for some expression of regret, by asking if it was not sad that he was gone, and saying—

"To think of that pleasant day last June, when he seemed so well! And he might have lived this dozen years if he had not gone to that wicked Paris, where they are always having revolutions."

She paused for some demonstration on our part. I saw Miss Matty could not speak, she was trembling so nervously; so I said what I really felt; and after a call of some duration —all the time of which I have no doubt Miss Pole thought Miss Matty received the news very calmly—our visitor took her leave.

Miss Matty made a strong effort to conceal her feelings—a concealment she practised even with me, for she has never alluded to Mr. Holbrook again, although the book he gave her lies with her Bible on the little table by her bedside. She did not think I heard her when she asked the little milliner of Cranford to make her caps something like the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson's, or that I noticed the reply—

"But she wears widows' caps, ma'am?"

"Oh? I only meant something in that style; not widows', of course, but rather like Mrs. Jamieson's."

This effort at concealment was the beginning of the tremulous motion of head and hands which I have seen ever since in Miss Matty.

The evening of the day on which we heard of Mr. Holbrook's death, Miss Matilda was very silent and thoughtful; after prayers she called Martha back, and then she stood uncertain what to say.

"Martha!" she said, at last, "you are young"—and then she made so long a pause that Martha, to remind her of her half-finished sentence, dropped a curtsey, and said—

"Yes, please, ma'am; two-and-twenty last third of October, please, ma'am."

"And, perhaps, Martha, you may some time meet with a young man you like, and who likes you. I did say you were not to have followers; but if you meet with such a young man, and tell me, and I find he is respectable, I have no objection to his coming to see you once a week. God forbid," said she in a low voice, "that I should grieve any young hearts!" She spoke as if she were providing for some distant contingency, and was rather startled when Martha made her ready eager answer—

"Please, ma'am, there's Jem Hearn, and he's a joiner making three-and-sixpence a-day, and six foot one in his stocking-feet, please, ma'am; and if you'll ask about him to-morrow morning, every one will give him a character for steadiness; and he'll be glad enough to come to-morrow night, I'll be bound."

Though Miss Matty was startled, she submitted to Fate and Love.

CHAPTER V

OLD LETTERS

I HAVE often noticed that almost every one has his own individual small economies—careful habits of saving fractions of pennies in some one peculiar direction—any disturbance of which annoys him more than spending shillings or pounds on some real extravagance. An old gentleman of my acquaintance, who took the intelligence of the failure of a Joint-Stock Bank, in which some of his money was invested, with stoical mildness, worried his family all through a long summer's day because one of them had torn (instead of cutting) out the written leaves of his now useless bank-book; of course, the corresponding pages at the other end came out as well, and this little unnecessary waste of paper (his private economy) chafed him more than all the loss of his money. Envelopes fretted his soul terribly when they first came in; the only way in which he could reconcile himself to such waste of his cherished article was by patiently turning inside out all that were sent to him, and so making them serve again. Even now, though tamed by age, I see him casting wistful glances at his daughters when they send a whole inside of a half-sheet of note-paper, with the three lines of acceptance to an invitation, written on only one of the sides. I am not above owning that I have this human weakness myself. String is my foible. My pockets get full of little hanks of it, picked up and twisted together, ready for uses that never come. I am seriously annoyed if any one cuts the string of a parcel instead of patiently and faithfully undoing it fold by fold. How people can bring themselves to use india-rubber rings, which are a sort of deification of string, as lightly as they do, I cannot imagine. To me an india-rubber ring is a precious treasure. I have one which is not new—one that I picked up off the floor nearly six

years ago. I have really tried to use it, but my heart failed me, and I could not commit the extravagance.

Small pieces of butter grieve others. They cannot attend to conversation because of the annoyance occasioned by the habit which some people have of invariably taking more butter than they want. Have you not seen the anxious look (almost mesmeric) which such persons fix on the article? They would feel it a relief if they might bury it out of their sight by popping it into their own mouths and swallowing it down; and they are really made happy if the person on whose plate it lies unused suddenly breaks off a piece of toast (which he does not want at all) and eats up his butter. They think that this is not waste.

Now Miss Matty Jenkyns was chary of candles. We had many devices to use as few as possible. In the winter afternoons she would sit knitting for two or three hours—she could do this in the dark, or by firelight—and when I asked if I might not ring for candles to finish stitching my wristbands, she told me to "keep blind man's holiday." They were usually brought in with tea; but we only burnt one at a time. As we lived in constant preparation for a friend who might come in any evening (but who never did), it required some contrivance to keep our two candles of the same length, ready to be lighted, and to look as if we burnt two always. The candles took it in turns; and, whatever we might be talking about or doing, Miss Matty's eyes were habitually fixed upon the candle, ready to jump up and extinguish it and to light the other before they had become too uneven in length to be restored to equality in the course of the evening.

One night, I remember this candle economy particularly annoyed me. I had been very much tired of my compulsory "blind man's holiday," especially as Miss Matty had fallen asleep, and I did not like to stir the fire and run the risk of awakening her; so I could not even sit on the rug, and scorch myself with sewing by firelight, according to my usual custom. I fancied Miss Matty must be dreaming of

her early life; for she spoke one or two words in her uneasy sleep bearing reference to persons who were dead long before. When Martha brought in the lighted candle and tea, Miss Matty started into wakefulness, with a strange, bewildered look around, as if we were not the people she expected to see about her. There was a little sad expression that shadowed her face as she recognised me; but immediately afterwards she tried to give me her usual smile. All through tea-time her talk ran upon the days of her childhood and youth. Perhaps this reminded her of the desirableness of looking over all the old family letters, and destroying such as ought not to be allowed to fall into the hands of strangers; for she had often spoken of the necessity of this task, but had always shrunk from it, with a timid dread of something painful. To-night, however, she rose up after tea and went for them—in the dark; for she piqued herself on the precise neatness of all her chamber arrangements, and used to look uneasily at me when I lighted a bed-candle to go to another room for anything. When she returned there was a faint, pleasant smell of Tonquin beans in the room. I had always noticed this scent about any of the things which had belonged to her mother; and many of the letters were addressed to her—yellow bundles of love-letters, sixty or seventy years old.

Miss Matty undid the packet with a sigh; but she stifled it directly, as if it were hardly right to regret the flight of time, or of life either. We agreed to look them over separately, each taking a different letter out of the same bundle and describing its contents to the other before destroying it. I never knew what sad work the reading of old letters was before that evening, though I could hardly tell why. The letters were as happy as letters could be—at least those early letters were. There was in them a vivid and intense sense of the present time, which seemed so strong and full, as if it could never pass away, and as if the warm, living hearts that so expressed themselves could never die, and be as nothing to the sunny earth. I should have felt less

melancholy, I believe, if the letters had been more so. I saw the tears stealing down the well-worn furrows of Miss Matty's cheeks, and her spectacles often wanted wiping. I trusted at last that she would light the other candle, for my own eyes were rather dim, and I wanted more light to see the pale, faded ink; but no, even through her tears she saw and remembered her little economical ways.

The earliest set of letters were two bundles tied together, and ticketed (in Miss Jenkyns's handwriting) "Letters interchanged between my ever-honoured father and my dearly-beloved mother, prior to their marriage, in July 1774." I should guess that the rector of Cranford was about twenty-seven years of age when he wrote those letters; and Miss Matty told me that her mother was just eighteen at the time of her wedding. With my idea of the rector, derived from a picture in the dining-parlour, stiff and stately, in a huge full-bottomed wig, with gown, cassock, and bands, and his hand upon a copy of the only sermon he ever published—it was strange to read these letters. They were full of eager, passionate ardour; short homely sentences, right fresh from the heart (very different from the grand Latinised, Johnsonian style of the printed sermon, preached before some judge at assize time). His letters were a curious contrast to those of his girl-bride. She was evidently rather annoyed at his demands upon her for expressions of love, and could not quite understand what he meant by repeating the same thing over in so many different ways; but what she was quite clear about was a longing for a white "Paduasoy"—whatever that might be; and six or seven letters were principally occupied in asking her lover to use his influence with her parents (who evidently kept her in good order) to obtain this or that article of dress, more especially the white "Paduasoy." He cared nothing how she was dressed; she was always lovely enough for him, as he took pains to assure her, when she begged him to express in his answers a predilection for particular pieces of finery, in order that she might show what he said to her parents. But at length

he seemed to find out that she would not be married till she had a "trousseau" to her mind; and then he sent her a letter, which had evidently accompanied a whole box full of finery, and in which he requested that she might be dressed in everything her heart desired. This was the first letter, ticketed in a frail, delicate hand, "From my dearest John." Shortly afterwards they were married, I suppose, from the intermission in their correspondence.

"We must burn them, I think," said Miss Matty, looking doubtfully at me. "No one will care for them when I am gone." And one by one she dropped them into the middle of the fire, watching each blaze up, die out, and rise away, in faint, white, ghostly semblance, up the chimney, before she gave another to the same fate. The room was light enough now; but I, like her, was fascinated into watching the destruction of those letters, into which the honest warmth of a manly heart had been poured forth.

The next letter, likewise docketed by Miss Jenkyns, was endorsed, "Letter of pious congratulation and exhortation from my venerable grandfather to my beloved mother, on occasion of my own birth. Also some practical remarks on the desirability of keeping warm the extremities of infants, from my excellent grandmother."

The first part was, indeed, a severe and forcible picture of the responsibilities of mothers, and a warning against the evils that were in the world, and lying in ghastly wait for the little baby of two days old. His wife did not write, said the old gentleman, because he had forbidden it, she being indisposed with a sprained ankle, which (he said) quite incapacitated her from holding a pen. However, at the foot of the page was a small "P.S.," and on turning it over, sure enough, there was a letter to "my dear, dearest Molly," begging her, when she left her room, whatever she did, to go *up* stairs before going *down:* and telling her to wrap her baby's feet up in flannel, and keep it warm by the fire, although it was summer, for babies were so tender.

It was pretty to see from the letters, which were evidently

exchanged with some frequency between the young mother and the grandmother, how the girlish vanity was being weeded out of her heart by love for her baby. The white "Paduasoy" figured again in the letters, with almost as much vigour as before. In one, it was being made into a christening cloak for the baby. It decked it when it went with its parents to spend a day or two at Arley Hall. It added to its charms, when it was "the prettiest little baby that ever was seen. Dear mother, I wish you could see her! Without any parshality, I do think she will grow up a regular bewty!" I thought of Miss Jenkyns, grey, withered, and wrinkled, and I wondered if her mother had known her in the courts of heaven: and then I knew that she had, and that they stood there in angelic guise.

There was a great gap before any of the rector's letters appeared. And then his wife had changed her mode of endorsement. It was no longer from "My dearest John;" it was from "My honoured Husband." The letters were written on occasion of the publication of the same sermon which was represented in the picture. The preaching before "My Lord Judge," and the "publishing by request," was evidently the culminating point—the event of his life. It had been necessary for him to go up to London to superintend it through the press. Many friends had to be called upon, and consulted, before he could decide on any printer fit for so onerous a task; and at length it was arranged that J. and J. Rivingtons were to have the honourable responsibility. The worthy rector seemed to be strung up by the occasion to a high literary pitch, for he could hardly write a letter to his wife without cropping out into Latin. I remember the end of one of his letters ran thus: "I shall ever hold the virtuous qualities of my Molly in remembrance, *dum memor ipse mei, dum spiritus hos regit artus*," which, considering that the English of his correspondent was sometimes at fault in grammar, and often in spelling, might be taken as a proof of how much he "idealised his Molly;" and, as Miss Jenkyns used to say, "People talk a great deal about

idealising now-a-days, whatever that may mean." But this was nothing to a fit of writing classical poetry which soon seized him, in which his Molly figured away as "Maria." The letter containing the *carmen* was endorsed by her, "Hebrew verses sent me by my honoured husband. I thowt to have had a letter about killing the pig, but must wait. Mem., to send the poetry to Sir Peter Arley, as my husband desires." And in a post-scriptum note in his handwriting it was stated that the Ode had appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, December 1782.

Her letters back to her husband (treasured as fondly by him as if they had been *M. T. Ciceronis Epistolæ*) were more satisfactory to an absent husband and father than his could ever have been to her. She told him how Deborah sewed her seam very neatly every day, and read to her in the books he had set her; how she was a very "forrard," good child, but *would* ask questions her mother could not answer; but how she did not let herself down by saying she did not know, but took to stirring the fire, or sending the "forrard" child on an errand. Matty was now the mother's darling, and promised (like her sister at her age) to be a great beauty. I was reading this aloud to Miss Matty, who smiled and sighed a little at the hope, so fondly expressed, that "little Matty might not be vain, even if she were a bewty."

"I had very pretty hair, my dear," said Miss Matilda; "and not a bad mouth." And I saw her soon afterwards adjust her cap and draw herself up.

But to return to Mrs. Jenkyns's letters. She told her husband about the poor in the parish; what homely domestic medicines she had administered; what kitchen physic she had sent. She had evidently held his displeasure as a rod in pickle over the heads of all the ne'er-do-wells. She asked for his directions about the cows and pigs; and did not always obtain them, as I have shown before.

The kind old grandmother was dead when a little boy was born, soon after the publication of the sermon; but

there was another letter of exhortation from the grandfather, more stringent and admonitory than ever, now that there was a boy to be guarded from the snares of the world. He described all the various sins into which men might fall, until I wondered how any man ever came to a natural death. The gallows seemed as if it must have been the termination of the lives of most of the grandfather's friends and acquaintance; and I was not surprised at the way in which he spoke of this life being "a vale of tears."

It seemed curious that I should never have heard of this brother before; but I concluded that he had died young, or else surely his name would have been alluded to by his sisters.

By-and-by we came to packets of Miss Jenkyns's letters. These Miss Matty did regret to burn. She said all the others had been only interesting to those who loved the writers, and that it seemed as if it would have hurt her to allow them to fall into the hands of strangers, who had not known her dear mother, and how good she was, although she did not always spell quite in the modern fashion; but Deborah's letters were so very superior! Any one might profit by reading them. It was a long time since she had read Mrs. Chapone, but she knew she used to think that Deborah could have said the same things quite as well; and as for Mrs. Carter! people thought a deal of her letters, just because she had written "Epictetus," but she was quite sure Deborah would never have made use of such a common expression as "I canna be fashed!"

Miss Matty did grudge burning these letters, it was evident. She would not let them be carelessly passed over with any quiet reading, and skipping, to myself. She took them from me, and even lighted the second candle in order to read them aloud with a proper emphasis, and without stumbling over the big words. Oh dear! how I wanted facts instead of reflections, before those letters were concluded! They lasted us two nights; and I won't deny that I made use of the time to think of many other

things, and yet I was always at my post at the end of each sentence.

The rector's letters, and those of his wife and mother-in-law, had all been tolerably short and pithy, written in a straight hand, with the lines very close together. Sometimes the whole letter was contained on a mere scrap of paper. The paper was very yellow, and the ink very brown; some of the sheets were (as Miss Matty made me observe) the old original post, with the stamp in the corner representing a post-boy riding for life and twanging his horn. The letters of Mrs. Jenkyns and her mother were fastened with a great round red wafer; for it was before Miss Edgeworth's "Patronage" had banished wafers from polite society. It was evident, from the tenor of what was said, that franks were in great request, and were even used as a means of paying debts by needy members of Parliament. The rector sealed his epistles with an immense coat of arms, and showed by the care with which he had performed this ceremony that he expected they should be cut open, not broken by any thoughtless or impatient hand. Now, Miss Jenkyns's letters were of a later date in form and writing. She wrote on the square sheet which we have learned to call old-fashioned. Her hand was admirably calculated, together with her use of many-syllabled words, to fill up a sheet, and then came the pride and delight of crossing. Poor Miss Matty got sadly puzzled with this, for the words gathered size like snowballs, and towards the end of her letter Miss Jenkyns used to become quite sesquipedalian. In one to her father, slightly theological and controversial in its tone, she had spoken of Herod, Tetrach of Idumea. Miss Matty read it "Herod Petrarch of Etruria," and was just as well pleased as if she had been right.

I can't quite remember the date, but I think it was in 1805 that Miss Jenkyns wrote the longest series of letters—on occasion of her absence on a visit to some friends near Newcastle-upon-Tyne. These friends were intimate with the commandant of the garrison there, and heard from him

of all the preparations that were being made to repel the invasion of Buonaparte, which some people imagined might take place at the mouth of the Tyne. Miss Jenkyns was evidently very much alarmed; and the first part of her letters was often written in pretty intelligible English, conveying particulars of the preparations which were made in the family with whom she was residing against the dreaded event; the bundles of clothes that were packed up ready for a flight to Alston Moor (a wild hilly piece of ground between Northumberland and Cumberland); the signal that was to be given for this flight, and for the simultaneous turning out of the volunteers under arms—which said signal was to consist (if I remember rightly) in ringing the church bells in a particular and ominous manner. One day, when Miss Jenkyns and her hosts were at a dinner-party in Newcastle, this warning summons was actually given (not a very wise proceeding, if there be any truth in the moral attached to the fable of the Boy and the Wolf; but so it was), and Miss Jenkyns, hardly recovered from her fright, wrote the next day to describe the sound, the breathless shock, the hurry and alarm; and then, taking breath, she added, "How trivial, my dear father, do all our apprehensions of the last evening appear, at the present moment, to calm and inquiring minds!" And here Miss Matty broke in with—

"But, indeed, my dear, they were not at all trivial or trifling at the time. I know I used to wake up in the night many a time and think I heard the tramp of the French entering Cranford. Many people talked of hiding themselves in the salt mines—and meat would have kept capitally down there, only perhaps we should have been thirsty. And my father preached a whole set of sermons on the occasion: one set in the mornings, all about David and Goliath, to spirit up the people to fighting with spades or bricks, if need were; and the other set in the afternoons, proving that Napoleon (that was another name for Bony, as we used to call him) was all the same as an Apollyon and Abaddon. I remember my father rather thought he

should be asked to print this last set; but the parish had, perhaps, had enough of them with hearing."

Peter Marmaduke Arley Jenkyns ("poor Peter!" as Miss Matty began to call him) was at school at Shrewsbury by this time. The rector took up his pen, and rubbed up his Latin once more, to correspond with his boy. It was very clear that the lad's were what are called show letters. They were of a highly mental description, giving an account of his studies, and his intellectual hopes of various kinds, with an occasional quotation from the classics; but, now and then, the animal nature broke out in such a little sentence as this, evidently written in a trembling hurry, after the letter had been inspected: "Mother dear, do send me a cake, and put plenty of citron in." The "mother dear" probably answered her boy in the form of cakes and "goody," for there were none of her letters among this set; but a whole collection of the rector's, to whom the Latin in his boy's letters was like a trumpet to the old war-horse. I do not know much about Latin, certainly, and it is, perhaps, an ornamental language, but not very useful, I think—at least to judge from the bits I remember out of the rector's letters. One was, "You have not got that town in your map of Ireland; but *Bonus Bernardus non videt omnia*, as the Proverbia say." Presently it became very evident that "poor Peter" got himself into many scrapes. There were letters of stilted penitence to his father, for some wrong-doing; and among them all was a badly-written, badly-sealed, badly-directed, blotted note—"My dear, dear, dear, dearest mother, I will be a better boy; I will, indeed; but don't, please, be ill for me; I am not worth it; but I will be good, darling mother."

Miss Matty could not speak for crying, after she had read this note. She gave it to me in silence, and then got up and took it to her sacred recesses in her own room, for fear, by any chance, it might get burnt. "Poor Peter!" she said; "he was always in scrapes; he was too easy. They led him wrong, and then left him in the lurch. But he was too fond of mischief. He could never resist a joke. Poor Peter!"

CHAPTER VI

POOR PETER

Poor Peter's career lay before him rather pleasantly mapped out by kind friends, but *Bonus Bernardus non videt omnia*, in this map too. He was to win honours at Shrewsbury School, and carry them thick to Cambridge, and after that, a living awaited him, in the gift of his godfather, Sir Peter Arley. Poor Peter! his lot in life was very different to what his friends had hoped and planned. Miss Matty told me all about it, and I think it was a relief to her when she had done so.

He was the darling of his mother, who seemed to dote on all her children, though she was, perhaps, a little afraid of Deborah's superior acquirements. Deborah was the favourite of her father, and when Peter disappointed him, she became his pride. The sole honour Peter brought away from Shrewsbury was the reputation of being the best good fellow that ever was, and of being the captain of the school in the art of practical joking. His father was disappointed, but set about remedying the matter in a manly way. He could not afford to send Peter to read with any tutor, but he could read with him himself; and Miss Matty told me much of the awful preparations in the way of dictionaries and lexicons that were made in her father's study the morning Peter began.

"My poor mother!" said she. "I remember how she used to stand in the hall, just near enough the study-door, to catch the tone of my father's voice. I could tell in a moment if all was going right, by her face. And it did go right for a long time."

"What went wrong at last?" said I. "That tiresome Latin, I dare say."

"No! it was not the Latin. Peter was in high favour with my father, for he worked up well for him. But he seemed to think that the Cranford people might be joked

about, and made fun of, and they did not like it; nobody does. He was always hoaxing them; 'hoaxing' is not a pretty word, my dear, and I hope you won't tell your father I used it, for I should not like him to think that I was not choice in my language, after living with such a woman as Deborah. And be sure you never use it yourself. I don't know how it slipped out of my mouth, except it was that I was thinking of poor Peter, and it was always his expression. But he was a very gentlemanly boy in many things. He was like dear Captain Brown in always being ready to help any old person or a child. Still, he did like joking and making fun; and he seemed to think the old ladies in Cranford would believe anything. There were many old ladies living here then; we are principally ladies now, I know, but we are not so old as the ladies used to be when I was a girl. I could laugh to think of some of Peter's jokes. No, my dear, I won't tell you of them, because they might not shock you as they ought to do, and they were very shocking. He even took in my father once, by dressing himself up as a lady that was passing through the town and wished to see the Rector of Cranford, 'who had published that admirable Assize Sermon.' Peter said he was awfully frightened himself when he saw how my father took it all in, and even offered to copy out all his Napoleon Buonaparte sermons for her—him, I mean—no, her, for Peter was a lady then. He told me he was more terrified than he ever was before, all the time my father was speaking. He did not think my father would have believed him; and yet, if he had not, it would have been a sad thing for Peter. As it was, he was none so glad of it, for my father kept him hard at work copying out all those twelve Buonaparte sermons for the lady—that was for Peter himself, you know. He was the lady. And once when he wanted to go fishing, Peter said, 'Confound the woman!'—very bad language, my dear, but Peter was not always so guarded as he should have been; my father was so angry with him, it nearly frightened me out of my wits: and yet I could hardly keep from laughing

at the little curtseys Peter kept making, quite slyly, whenever my father spoke of the lady's excellent taste and sound discrimination."

"Did Miss Jenkyns know of these tricks?" said I.

"Oh, no! Deborah would have been too much shocked. No, no one knew but me. I wish I had always known of Peter's plans; but sometimes he did not tell me. He used to say the old ladies in the town wanted something to talk about; but I don't think they did. They had the *St. James's Chronicle* three times a week, just as we have now, and we have plenty to say; and I remember the clacking noise there always was when some of the ladies got together. But, probably, schoolboys talk more than ladies. At last there was a terrible, sad thing happened." Miss Matty got up, went to the door, and opened it; no one was there. She rang the bell for Martha, and when Martha came, her mistress told her to go for eggs to a farm at the other end of the town.

"I will lock the door after you, Martha. You are not afraid to go, are you?"

"No, ma'am, not at all; Jem Hearn will be only too proud to go with me."

Miss Matty drew herself up, and as soon as we were alone, she wished that Martha had more maidenly reserve.

"We'll put out the candle, my dear. We can talk just as well by firelight, you know. There! Well, you see, Deborah had gone from home for a fortnight or so; it was a very still, quiet day, I remember, overhead; and the lilacs were all in flower, so I suppose it was spring. My father had gone out to see some sick people in the parish; I recollect seeing him leave the house with his wig and shovel-hat and cane. What possessed our poor Peter I don't know; he had the sweetest temper, and yet he always seemed to like to plague Deborah. She never laughed at his jokes, and thought him ungenteel, and not careful enough about improving his mind; and that vexed him.

"Well! he went to her room, it seems, and dressed himself in her old gown, and shawl, and bonnet; just the things she used to wear in Cranford, and was known by everywhere; and he made the pillow into a little—you are sure you locked the door, my dear, for I should not like any one to hear—into—into a little baby, with white long clothes. It was only, as he told me afterwards, to make something to talk about in the town; he never thought of it as affecting Deborah. And he went and walked up and down in the Filbert walk—just half-hidden by the rails, and half-seen; and he cuddled his pillow, just like a baby, and talked to it all the nonsense people do. Oh dear! and my father came stepping stately up the street, as he always did; and what should he see but a little black crowd of people—I dare say as many as twenty—all peeping through his garden rails. So he thought, at first, they were only looking at a new rhododendron that was in full bloom, and that he was very proud of; and he walked slower, that they might have more time to admire. And he wondered if he could make out a sermon from the occasion, and thought, perhaps, there was some relation between the rhododendrons and the lilies of the field. My poor father! When he came nearer, he began to wonder that they did not see him; but their heads were all so close together, peeping and peeping! My father was amongst them, meaning, he said, to ask them to walk into the garden with him, and admire the beautiful vegetable production, when—oh, my dear! I tremble to think of it—he looked through the rails himself, and saw—I don't know what he thought he saw, but old Clare told me his face went quite grey-white with anger, and his eyes blazed out under his frowning black brows; and he spoke out—oh, so terribly!—and bade them all stop where they were—not one of them to go, not one to stir a step; and, swift as light, he was in at the garden door, and down the Filbert walk, and seized hold of poor Peter, and tore his clothes off his back—bonnet, shawl, gown, and all—and threw the pillow among the people over the railings: and then he was very, very angry

indeed, and before all the people he lifted up his cane and flogged Peter!

"My dear, that boy's trick, on that sunny day, when all seemed going straight and well, broke my mother's heart, and changed my father for life. It did, indeed. Old Clare said, Peter looked as white as my father; and stood as still as a statue to be flogged; and my father struck hard! When my father stopped to take breath, Peter said, 'Have you done enough, sir?' quite hoarsely, and still standing quite quiet. I don't know what my father said—or if he said anything. But old Clare said, Peter turned to where the people outside the railing were, and made them a low bow, as grand and as grave as any gentleman; and then walked slowly into the house. I was in the store-room helping my mother to make cowslip wine. I cannot abide the wine now, nor the scent of the flowers; they turn me sick and faint, as they did that day, when Peter came in, looking as haughty as any man—indeed, looking like a man, not like a boy. 'Mother!' he said, 'I am come to say, God bless you for ever.' I saw his lips quiver as he spoke; and I think he durst not say anything more loving, for the purpose that was in his heart. She looked at him rather frightened, and wondering, and asked him what was to do. He did not smile or speak, but put his arms round her and kissed her as if he did not know how to leave off; and before she could speak again, he was gone. We talked it over, and could not understand it, and she bade me go and seek my father, and ask what it was all about. I found him walking up and down, looking very highly displeased.

"'Tell your mother I have flogged Peter, and that he richly deserved it.'

"I durst not ask any more questions. When I told my mother, she sat down, quite faint, for a minute. I remember, a few days after, I saw the poor, withered cowslip flowers thrown out to the leaf heap, to decay and die there. There was no making of cowslip wine that year at the rectory—nor, indeed, ever after.

"Presently my mother went to my father. I know I thought of Queen Esther and King Ahasuerus; for my mother was very pretty and delicate-looking, and my father looked as terrible as King Ahasuerus. Some time after they came out together; and then my mother told me what had happened, and that she was going up to Peter's room at my father's desire—though she was not to tell Peter this—to talk the matter over with him. But no Peter was there. We looked over the house; no Peter was there! Even my father, who had not liked to join in the search at first, helped us before long. The rectory was a very old house—steps up into a room, steps down into a room, all through. At first, my mother went calling low and soft, as if to reassure the poor boy, 'Peter! Peter, dear! it's only me;' but, by-and-by, as the servants came back from the errands my father had sent them, in different directions, to find where Peter was—as we found he was not in the garden, nor the hayloft, nor anywhere about—my mother's cry grew louder and wilder, 'Peter! Peter, my darling! where are you?' for then she felt and understood that that long kiss meant some sad kind of 'good-bye.' The afternoon went on—my mother never resting, but seeking again and again in every possible place that had been looked into twenty times before, nay, that she had looked into over and over again herself. My father sat with his head in his hands, not speaking except when his messengers came in, bringing no tidings; then he lifted up his face, so strong and sad, and told them to go again in some new direction. My mother kept passing from room to room, in and out of the house, moving noiselessly, but never ceasing. Neither she nor my father durst leave the house, which was the meeting-place for all the messengers. At last (and it was nearly dark), my father rose up. He took hold of my mother's arm as she came with wild, sad pace through one door, and quickly towards another. She started at the touch of his hand, for she had forgotten all in the world but Peter.

"'Molly!' said he, 'I did not think all this would

happen.' He looked into her face for comfort—her poor face, all wild and white; for neither she nor my father had dared to acknowledge—much less act upon—the terror that was in their hearts, lest Peter should have made away with himself. My father saw no conscious look in his wife's hot, dreary eyes, and he missed the sympathy that she had always been ready to give him—strong man as he was, and at the dumb despair in her face his tears began to flow. But when she saw this, a gentle sorrow came over her countenance, and she said, 'Dearest John! don't cry; come with me, and we'll find him,' almost as cheerfully as if she knew where he was. And she took my father's great hand in her little soft one and led him along, the tears dropping as he walked on that same unceasing, weary walk, from room to room, through house and garden.

"Oh, how I wished for Deborah! I had no time for crying, for now all seemed to depend on me. I wrote for Deborah to come home. I sent a message privately to that same Mr. Holbrook's house — poor Mr. Holbrook;—you know who I mean. I don't mean I sent a message to him, but I sent one that I could trust to know if Peter was at his house. For at one time Mr. Holbrook was an occasional visitor at the rectory—you know he was Miss Pole's cousin—and he had been very kind to Peter, and taught him how to fish—he was very kind to everybody, and I thought Peter might have gone off there. But Mr. Holbrook was from home, and Peter had never been seen. It was night now; but the doors were all wide open, and my father and mother walked on and on; it was more than an hour since he had joined her, and I don't believe they had ever spoken all that time. I was getting the parlour fire lighted, and one of the servants was preparing tea, for I wanted them to have something to eat and drink and warm them, when old Clare asked to speak to me.

"'I have borrowed the nets from the weir, Miss Matty. Shall we drag the ponds to-night, or wait for the morning?'

"I remember staring in his face to gather his meaning;

and when I did, I laughed out loud. The horror of that new thought—our bright, darling Peter, cold, and stark, and dead! I remember the ring of my own laugh now.

"The next day Deborah was at home before I was myself again. She would not have been so weak as to give way as I had done; but my screams (my horrible laughter had ended in crying) had roused my sweet dear mother, whose poor wandering wits were called back and collected as soon as a child needed her care. She and Deborah sat by my bedside; I knew by the looks of each that there had been no news of Peter—no awful, ghastly news, which was what I most had dreaded in my dull state between sleeping and waking.

"The same result of all the searching had brought something of the same relief to my mother, to whom, I am sure, the thought that Peter might even then be hanging dead in some of the familiar home places had caused that never-ending walk of yesterday. Her soft eyes never were the same again after that; they had always a restless, craving look, as if seeking for what they could not find. Oh! it was an awful time; coming down like a thunderbolt on the still sunny day when the lilacs were all in bloom."

"Where was Mr. Peter?" said I.

"He had made his way to Liverpool; and there was war then; and some of the king's ships lay off the mouth of the Mersey; and they were only too glad to have a fine likely boy such as him (five foot nine he was) come to offer himself. The captain wrote to my father, and Peter wrote to my mother. Stay! those letters will be somewhere here."

We lighted the candle, and found the captain's letter and Peter's too. And we also found a little simple begging letter from Mrs. Jenkyns to Peter, addressed to him at the house of an old schoolfellow, whither she fancied he might have gone. They had returned it unopened; and unopened it had remained ever since, having been inadvertently put by among the other letters of that time. This is it:—

"My dearest Peter,—You did not think we should be so sorry as we are, I know, or you would never have gone away. You are too good. Your father sits and sighs till my heart aches to hear him. He cannot hold up his head for grief; and yet he only did what he thought was right. Perhaps he has been too severe, and perhaps I have not been kind enough; but God knows how we love you, my dear only boy. Don looks so sorry you are gone. Come back, and make us happy, who love you so much. I *know* you will come back."

But Peter did not come back. That spring day was the last time he ever saw his mother's face. The writer of the letter—the last—the only person who had ever seen what was written in it, was dead long ago; and I, a stranger, not born at the time when this occurrence took place, was the one to open it.

The captain's letter summoned the father and mother to Liverpool instantly, if they wished to see their boy; and, by some of the wild chances of life, the captain's letter had been detained somewhere, somehow.

Miss Matty went on, "And it was race-time, and all the post-horses at Cranford were gone to the races; but my father and mother set off in our own gig—and oh! my dear, they were too late—the ship was gone! And now read Peter's letter to my mother!"

It was full of love, and sorrow, and pride in his new profession, and a sore sense of his disgrace in the eyes of the people at Cranford; but ending with a passionate entreaty that she would come and see him before he left the Mersey: "Mother; we may go into battle. I hope we shall, and lick those French: but I must see you again before that time."

"And she was too late," said Miss Matty; "too late!"

We sat in silence, pondering on the full meaning of those sad, sad words. At length I asked Miss Matty to tell me how her mother bore it.

"Oh!" she said, "she was patience itself. She had

never been strong, and this weakened her terribly. My father used to sit looking at her: far more sad than she was. He seemed as if he could look at nothing else when she was by; and he was so humble—so very gentle now. He would, perhaps, speak in his old way—laying down the law, as it were—and then, in a minute or two, he would come round and put his hand on our shoulders, and ask us in a low voice, if he had said anything to hurt us. I did not wonder at his speaking so to Deborah, for she was so clever; but I could not bear to hear him talking so to me.

"But, you see, he saw what we did not—that it was killing my mother. Yes! killing her (put out the candle, my dear; I can talk better in the dark), for she was but a frail woman, and ill-fitted to stand the fright and shock she had gone through; and she would smile at him and comfort him, not in words, but in her looks and tones, which were always cheerful when he was there. And she would speak of how she thought Peter stood a good chance of being admiral very soon—he was so brave and clever; and how she thought of seeing him in his navy uniform, and what sort of hats admirals wore; and how much more fit he was to be a sailor than a clergyman; and all in that way, just to make my father think she was quite glad of what came of that unlucky morning's work, and the flogging which was always in his mind, as we all knew. But oh, my dear! the bitter, bitter crying she had when she was alone; and at last, as she grew weaker, she could not keep her tears in when Deborah or me was by, and would give us message after message for Peter (his ship had gone to the Mediterranean, or somewhere down there, and then he was ordered off to India, and there was no overland route then); but she still said that no one knew where their death lay in wait, and that we were not to think hers was near. We did not think it, but we knew it, as we saw her fading away.

"Well, my dear, it's very foolish of me, I know, when in all likelihood I am so near seeing her again.

"And only think, love! the very day after her death—for

she did not live quite a twelvemonth after Peter went away—the very day after—came a parcel for her from India—from her poor boy. It was a large, soft, white India shawl, with just a little narrow border all round; just what my mother would have liked.

"We thought it might rouse my father, for he had sat with her hand in his all night long; so Deborah took it in to him, and Peter's letter to her, and all. At first, he took no notice; and we tried to make a kind of light careless talk about the shawl, opening it out and admiring it. Then, suddenly, he got up, and spoke: 'She shall be buried in it,' he said; 'Peter shall have that comfort; and she would have liked it.'

"Well, perhaps it was not reasonable, but what could we do or say? One gives people in grief their own way. He took it up and felt it: 'It is just such a shawl as she wished for when she was married, and her mother did not give it her. I did not know of it till after, or she should have had it—she should; but she shall have it now.'

"My mother looked so lovely in her death! She was always pretty, and now she looked fair, and waxen, and young—younger than Deborah, as she stood trembling and shivering by her. We decked her in the long soft folds; she lay smiling, as if pleased; and people came—all Cranford came—to beg to see her, for they had loved her dearly, as well they might; and the countrywomen brought posies; old Clare's wife brought some white violets, and begged they might lie on her breast.

"Deborah said to me, the day of my mother's funeral, that if she had a hundred offers she never would marry and leave my father. It was not very likely she would have so many—I don't know that she had one; but it was not less to her credit to say so. She was such a daughter to my father as I think there never was before or since. His eyes failed him, and she read book after book, and wrote, and copied, and was always at his service in any parish business. She could do many more things than my poor mother could;

she even once wrote a letter to the bishop for my father. But he missed my mother sorely; the whole parish noticed it. Not that he was less active; I think he was more so, and more patient in helping every one. I did all I could to set Deborah at liberty to be with him; for I knew I was good for little, and that my best work in the world was to do odd jobs quietly, and set others at liberty. But my father was a changed man."

"Did Mr. Peter ever come home?"

"Yes, once. He came home a lieutenant; he did not get to be admiral. And he and my father were such friends! My father took him into every house in the parish, he was so proud of him. He never walked out without Peter's arm to lean upon. Deborah used to smile (I don't think we ever laughed again after my mother's death), and say she was quite put in a corner. Not but what my father always wanted her when there was letter-writing or reading to be done, or anything to be settled.'

"And then?" said I, after a pause.

"Then Peter went to sea again; and, by-and-by, my father died, blessing us both, and thanking Deborah for all she had been to him; and, of course, our circumstances were changed; and, instead of living at the rectory, and keeping three maids and a man, we had to come to this small house, and be content with a servant-of-all-work; but, as Deborah used to say, we have always lived genteelly, even if circumstances have compelled us to simplicity. Poor Deborah!"

"And Mr. Peter?" asked I.

"Oh, there was some great war in India—I forget what they call it—and we have never heard of Peter since then. I believe he is dead myself; and it sometimes fidgets me that we have never put on mourning for him. And then again, when I sit by myself, and all the house is still, I think I hear his step coming up the street, and my heart begins to flutter and beat; but the sound always goes past—and Peter never comes."

"That's Martha back? No! *I'll* go, my dear; I can

always find my way in the dark, you know. And a blow of fresh air at the door will do my head good, and it's rather got a trick of aching."

So she pattered off. I had lighted the candle, to give the room a cheerful appearance against her return.

"Was it Martha?" asked I.

"Yes. And I am rather uncomfortable, for I heard such a strange noise, just as I was opening the door."

"Where?" I asked, for her eyes were round with affright.

"In the street—just outside—it sounded like"——

"Talking?" I put in, as she hesitated a little.

"No! kissing"——

CHAPTER VII

VISITING

One morning, as Miss Matty and I sat at our work—it was before twelve o'clock, and Miss Matty had not changed the cap with yellow ribbons that had been Miss Jenkyns's best, and which Miss Matty was now wearing out in private, putting on the one made in imitation of Mrs. Jamieson's at all times when she expected to be seen—Martha came up, and asked if Miss Betty Barker might speak to her mistress. Miss Matty assented, and quickly disappeared to change the yellow ribbons, while Miss Barker came upstairs; but, as she had forgotten her spectacles, and was rather flurried by the unusual time of the visit, I was not surprised to see her return with one cap on the top of the other. She was quite unconscious of it herself, and looked at us with bland satisfaction. Nor do I think Miss Barker perceived it; for, putting aside the little circumstance that she was not so young as she had been, she was very much absorbed in her

errand, which she delivered herself of with an oppressive modesty that found vent in endless apologies.

Miss Betty Barker was the daughter of the old clerk at Cranford who had officiated in Mr. Jenkyns's time. She and her sister had had pretty good situations as ladies' maids, and had saved money enough to set up a milliner's shop, which had been patronised by the ladies in the neighbourhood. Lady Arley, for instance, would occasionally give Miss Barkers the pattern of an old cap of hers, which they immediately copied and circulated among the *élite* of Cranford. I say the *élite*, for Miss Barkers had caught the trick of the place, and piqued themselves upon their "aristocratic connection." They would not sell their caps and ribbons to any one without a pedigree. Many a farmer's wife or daughter turned away huffed from Miss Barkers' select millinery, and went rather to the universal shop, where the profits of brown soap and moist sugar enabled the proprietor to go straight to (Paris, he said, until he found his customers too patriotic and John Bullish to wear what the Mounseers wore) London, where, as he often told his customers, Queen Adelaide had appeared, only the very week before, in a cap exactly like the one he showed them, trimmed with yellow and blue ribbons, and had been complimented by King William on the becoming nature of her head-dress.

Miss Barkers, who confined themselves to truth, and did not approve of miscellaneous customers, throve notwithstanding. They were self-denying, good people. Many a time have I seen the eldest of them (she that had been maid to Mrs. Jamieson) carrying out some delicate mess to a poor person. They only aped their betters in having "nothing to do" with the class immediately below theirs. And when Miss Barker died, their profits and income were found to be such that Miss Betty was justified in shutting up shop and retiring from business. She also (as I think I have before said) set up her cow; a mark of respectability in Cranford almost as decided as setting up a gig is among some people. She dressed finer than any lady in Cranford; and we did not

wonder at it; for it was understood that she was wearing out all the bonnets and caps and outrageous ribbons which had once formed her stock-in-trade. It was five or six years since she had given up shop, so in any other place than Cranford her dress might have been considered *passée*.

And now Miss Betty Barker had called to invite Miss Matty to tea at her house on the following Tuesday. She gave me also an impromptu invitation, as I happened to be a visitor—though I could see she had a little fear lest, since my father had gone to live in Drumble, he might have engaged in that "horrid cotton trade," and so dragged his family down out of "aristocratic society." She prefaced this invitation with so many apologies that she quite excited my curiosity. "Her presumption" was to be excused. What had she been doing? She seemed so overpowered by it, I could only think that she had been writing to Queen Adelaide to ask for a receipt for washing lace; but the act which she so characterised was only an invitation she had carried to her sister's former mistress, Mrs. Jamieson. "Her former occupation considered, could Miss Matty excuse the liberty?" Ah! thought I, she has found out that double cap, and is going to rectify Miss Matty's head-dress. No! it was simply to extend her invitation to Miss Matty and to me. Miss Matty bowed acceptance; and I wondered that, in the graceful action, she did not feel the unusual weight and extraordinary height of her head-dress. But I do not think she did, for she recovered her balance, and went on talking to Miss Betty in a kind, condescending manner, very different from the fidgety way she would have had if she had suspected how singular her appearance was.

"Mrs. Jamieson is coming, I think you said?" asked Miss Matty.

"Yes. Mrs. Jamieson most kindly and condescendingly said she would be happy to come. One little stipulation she made, that she should bring Carlo. I told her that if I had a weakness, it was for dogs."

"And Miss Pole?" questioned Miss Matty, who was

thinking of her pool at Preference, in which Carlo would not be available as a partner.

"I am going to ask Miss Pole. Of course, I could not think of asking her until I had asked you, madam—the rector's daughter, madam. Believe me, I do not forget the situation my father held under yours."

"And Mrs. Forrester, of course?"

"And Mrs. Forrester. I thought, in fact, of going to her before I went to Miss Pole. Although her circumstances are changed, madam, she was born at Tyrrell, and we can never forget her alliance to the Bigges, of Bigelow Hall."

Miss Matty cared much more for the little circumstance of her being a very good card-player.

"Mrs. Fitz-Adam—I suppose"——

"No, madam. I must draw a line somewhere. Mrs. Jamieson would not, I think, like to meet Mrs. Fitz-Adam. I have the greatest respect for Mrs. Fitz-Adam—but I cannot think her fit society for such ladies as Mrs. Jamieson and Miss Matilda Jenkyns."

Miss Betty Barker bowed low to Miss Matty, and pursed up her mouth. She looked at me with sidelong dignity, as much as to say, although a retired milliner, she was no democrat, and understood the difference of ranks.

"May I beg you to come as near half-past six to my little dwelling, as possible, Miss Matilda? Mrs. Jamieson dines at five, but has kindly promised not to delay her visit beyond that time—half-past six." And with a swimming curtsey Miss Betty Barker took her leave.

My prophetic soul foretold a visit that afternoon from Miss Pole, who usually came to call on Miss Matilda after any event—or indeed in sight of any event—to talk it over with her.

"Miss Betty told me it was to be a choice and select few," said Miss Pole, as she and Miss Matty compared notes.

"Yes, so she said. Not even Mrs. Fitz-Adam."

Now Mrs. Fitz-Adam was the widowed sister of the

Cranford surgeon, whom I have named before. Their parents were respectable farmers, content with their station. The name of these good people was Hoggins. Mr. Hoggins was the Cranford doctor now; we disliked the name and considered it coarse; but, as Miss Jenkyns said, if he changed it to Piggins it would not be much better. We had hoped to discover a relationship between him and that Marchioness of Exeter whose name was Molly Hoggins; but the man, careless of his own interests, utterly ignored and denied any such relationship, although, as dear Miss Jenkyns had said, he had a sister called Mary, and the same Christian names were very apt to run in families.

Soon after Miss Mary Hoggins married Mr. Fitz-Adam she disappeared from the neighbourhood for many years. She did not move in a sphere in Cranford society sufficiently high to make any of us care to know what Mr. Fitz-Adam was. He died and was gathered to his fathers without our ever having thought about him at all. And then Mrs. Fitz-Adam reappeared in Cranford ("as bold as a lion," Miss Pole said), a well-to-do widow, dressed in rustling black silk, so soon after her husband's death that poor Miss Jenkyns was justified in the remark she made, that "bombazine would have shown a deeper sense of her loss."

I remember the convocation of ladies who assembled to decide whether or not Mrs. Fitz-Adam should be called upon by the old blue-blooded inhabitants of Cranford. She had taken a large rambling house, which had been usually considered to confer a patent of gentility upon its tenant, because, once upon a time, seventy or eighty years before, the spinster daughter of an earl had resided in it. I am not sure if the inhabiting this house was not also believed to convey some unusual power of intellect; for the earl's daughter, Lady Jane, had a sister, Lady Anne, who had married a general officer in the time of the American war, and this general officer had written one or two comedies, which were still acted on the London boards, and which, when we saw them advertised, made us all draw up, and

feel that Drury Lane was paying a very pretty compliment to Cranford. Still, it was not all a settled thing that Mrs. Fitz-Adam was to be visited, when dear Miss Jenkyns died; and, with her, something of the clear knowledge of the strict code of gentility went out too. As Miss Pole observed, "As most of the ladies of good family in Cranford were elderly spinsters, or widows without children, if we did not relax a little, and become less exclusive, by-and-by we should have no society at all."

Mrs. Forrester continued on the same side.

"She had always understood that Fitz meant something aristocratic; there was Fitz-Roy—she thought that some of the King's children had been called Fitz-Roy; and there was Fitz-Clarence now—they were the children of dear good King William the Fourth. Fitz-Adam!—it was a pretty name, and she thought it very probably meant 'Child of Adam.' No one, who had not some good blood in their veins, would dare to be called Fitz; there was a deal in a name—she had had a cousin who spelt his name with two little ffs—ffoulkes—and he always looked down upon capital letters, and said they belonged to lately-invented families. She had been afraid he would die a bachelor, he was so very choice. When he met a Mrs. ffarringdon, at a watering-place, he took to her immediately; and a very pretty genteel woman she was—a widow, with a very good fortune; and 'my cousin,' Mr. ffoulkes, married her; and it was all owing to her two little ffs."

Mrs. Fitz-Adam did not stand a chance of meeting with a Mr. Fitz-anything in Cranford, so that could not have been her motive for settling there. Miss Matty thought it might have been the hope of being admitted into the society of the place, which would certainly be a very agreeable rise for *ci-devant* Miss Hoggins; and if this had been her hope it would be cruel to disappoint her.

So everybody called upon Mrs. Fitz-Adam—everybody but Mrs. Jamieson, who used to show how honourable she was by never seeing Mrs. Fitz-Adam when they met at the

Cranford parties. There would be only eight or ten ladies in the room, and Mrs. Fitz-Adam was the largest of all, and she invariably used to stand up when Mrs. Jamieson came in, and curtsey very low to her whenever she turned in her direction—so low, in fact, that I think Mrs. Jamieson must have looked at the wall above her, for she never moved a muscle of her face, no more than if she had not seen her. Still Mrs. Fitz-Adam persevered.

The spring evenings were getting bright and long when three or four ladies in calashes met at Miss Barker's door. Do you know what a calash is? It is a covering worn over caps, not unlike the heads fastened on old-fashioned gigs; but sometimes it is not quite so large. This kind of head-gear always made an awful impression on the children in Cranford; and now two or three left off their play in the quiet sunny little street, and gathered in wondering silence round Miss Pole, Miss Matty, and myself. We were silent too, so that we could hear loud, suppressed whispers inside Miss Barker's house: "Wait, Peggy! wait till I've run upstairs and washed my hands. When I cough, open the door; I'll not be a minute."

And, true enough, it was not a minute before we heard a noise, between a sneeze and a crow; on which the door flew open. Behind it stood a round-eyed maiden, all aghast at the honourable company of calashes, who marched in without a word. She recovered presence of mind enough to usher us into a small room, which had been the shop, but was now converted into a temporary dressing-room. There we unpinned and shook ourselves, and arranged our features before the glass into a sweet and gracious company-face; and then, bowing backwards with "After you, ma'am," we allowed Mrs. Forrester to take precedence up the narrow staircase that led to Miss Barker's drawing-room. There she sat, as stately and composed as though we had never heard that odd-sounding cough, from which her throat must have been even then sore and rough. Kind, gentle, shabbily-dressed Mrs. Forrester was immediately conducted to the

second place of honour—a seat arranged something like Prince Albert's near the Queen's—good, but not so good. The place of pre-eminence was, of course, reserved for the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson, who presently came panting up the stairs—Carlo rushing round her on her progress, as if he meant to trip her up.

And now Miss Betty Barker was a proud and happy woman! She stirred the fire, and shut the door, and sat as near to it as she could, quite on the edge of her chair. When Peggy came in, tottering under the weight of the tea-tray, I noticed that Miss Barker was sadly afraid lest Peggy should not keep her distance sufficiently. She and her mistress were on very familiar terms in their every-day intercourse, and Peggy wanted now to make several little confidences to her, which Miss Barker was on thorns to hear, but which she thought it her duty, as a lady, to repress. So she turned away from all Peggy's asides and signs; but she made one or two very malapropos answers to what was said; and at last, seized with a bright idea, she exclaimed, "Poor, sweet Carlo! I'm forgetting him. Come down-stairs with me, poor ittie doggie, and it shall have its tea, it shall!"

In a few minutes she returned, bland and benignant as before; but I thought she had forgotten to give the "poor ittie doggie" anything to eat, judging by the avidity with which he swallowed down chance pieces of cake. The tea-tray was abundantly loaded—I was pleased to see it, I was so hungry; but I was afraid the ladies present might think it vulgarly heaped up. I know they would have done at their own houses; but somehow the heaps disappeared here. I saw Mrs. Jamieson eating seed-cake, slowly and considerately, as she did everything; and I was rather surprised, for I knew she had told us, on the occasion of her last party, that she never had it in her house, it reminded her so much of scented soap. She always gave us Savoy biscuits. However, Mrs. Jamieson was kindly indulgent to Miss Barker's want of knowledge of the customs of high

life; and, to spare her feelings, ate three large pieces of seed-cake, with a placid, ruminating expression of countenance, not unlike a cow's.

After tea there was some little demur and difficulty. We were six in number; four could play at Preference, and for the other two there was Cribbage. But all, except myself (I was rather afraid of the Cranford ladies at cards, for it was the most earnest and serious business they ever engaged in), were anxious to be of the "pool." Even Miss Barker, while declaring she did not know Spadille from Manille, was evidently hankering to take a hand. The dilemma was soon put an end to by a singular kind of noise. If a baron's daughter-in-law could ever be supposed to snore, I should have said Mrs. Jamieson did so then; for, overcome by the heat of the room, and inclined to doze by nature, the temptation of that very comfortable arm-chair had been too much for her, and Mrs. Jamieson was nodding. Once or twice she opened her eyes with an effort, and calmly but unconsciously smiled upon us; but by-and-by even her benevolence was not equal to this exertion, and she was sound asleep.

"It is very gratifying to me," whispered Miss Barker at the card-table to her three opponents, whom, notwithstanding her ignorance of the game, she was "basting" most unmercifully—"very gratifying indeed, to see how completely Mrs. Jamieson feels at home in my poor little dwelling; she could not have paid me a greater compliment."

Miss Barker provided me with some literature in the shape of three or four handsomely-bound fashion-books ten or twelve years old, observing, as she put a little table and a candle for my especial benefit, that she knew young people liked to look at pictures. Carlo lay and snorted, and started at his mistress's feet. He, too, was quite at home.

The card-table was an animated scene to watch; four ladies' heads, with niddle-noddling caps, all nearly meeting over the middle of the table in their eagerness to whisper quick enough and loud enough; and every now and then

came Miss Barker's "Hush, ladies! if you please, hush! Mrs. Jamieson is asleep."

It was very difficult to steer clear between Mrs. Forrester's deafness and Mrs. Jamieson's sleepiness. But Miss Barker managed her arduous task well. She repeated the whisper to Mrs. Forrester, distorting her face considerably, in order to show, by the motions of her lips, what was said; and then she smiled kindly all round at us, and murmured to herself, "Very gratifying, indeed; I wish my poor sister had been alive to see this day."

Presently the door was thrown wide open; Carlo started to his feet, with a loud snapping bark, and Mrs. Jamieson awoke: or, perhaps, she had not been asleep—as she said almost directly, the room had been so light she had been glad to keep her eyes shut, but had been listening with great interest to all our amusing and agreeable conversation. Peggy came in once more, red with importance. Another tray! "Oh, gentility!" thought I, "can you endure this last shock?" For Miss Barker had ordered (nay, I doubt not, prepared, although she did say, "Why, Peggy, what have you brought us?" and looked pleasantly surprised at the unexpected pleasure) all sorts of good things for supper—scalloped oysters, potted lobsters, jelly, a dish called "little Cupids" (which was in great favour with the Cranford ladies, although too expensive to be given, except on solemn and state occasions—maccaroons sopped in brandy, I should have called it, if I had not known its more refined and classical name). In short, we were evidently to be feasted with all that was sweetest and best; and we thought it better to submit graciously, even at the cost of our gentility—which never ate suppers in general, but which, like most non-supper-eaters, was particularly hungry on all special occasions.

Miss Barker, in her former sphere, had, I dare say, been made acquainted with the beverage they call cherry-brandy. We none of us had ever seen such a thing, and rather shrank back when she proffered it us—"just a little, leetle glass.

ladies; after the oysters and lobsters, you know. Shell-fish are sometimes thought not very wholesome." We all shook our heads like female mandarins; but, at last, Mrs. Jamieson suffered herself to be persuaded, and we followed her lead. It was not exactly unpalatable, though so hot and so strong that we thought ourselves bound to give evidence that we were not accustomed to such things by coughing terribly—almost as strangely as Miss Barker had done, before we were admitted by Peggy.

"It's very strong," said Miss Pole, as she put down her empty glass; "I do believe there's spirit in it."

"Only a little drop—just necessary to make it keep," said Miss Barker. "You know we put brandy-paper over preserves to make them keep. I often feel tipsy myself from eating damson tart."

I question whether damson tart would have opened Mrs. Jamieson's heart as the cherry-brandy did; but she told us of a coming event, respecting which she had been quite silent till that moment.

"My sister-in-law, Lady Glenmire, is coming to stay with me."

There was a chorus of "Indeed!" and then a pause. Each one rapidly reviewed her wardrobe, as to its fitness to appear in the presence of a baron's widow; for, of course, a series of small festivals were always held in Cranford on the arrival of a visitor at any of our friends' houses. We felt very pleasantly excited on the present occasion.

Not long after this the maids and the lanterns were announced. Mrs. Jamieson had the sedan-chair, which had squeezed itself into Miss Barker's narrow lobby with some difficulty, and most literally "stopped the way." It required some skilful manœuvring on the part of the old chairmen (shoemakers by day, but when summoned to carry the sedan dressed up in a strange old livery—long great-coats, with small capes, coeval with the sedan, and similar to the dress of the class in Hogarth's pictures) to edge, and back, and try at it again, and finally to succeed in carrying their burden

out of Miss Barker's front door. Then we heard their quick pit-a-pat along the quiet little street as we put on our calashes and pinned up our gowns; Miss Barker hovering about us with offers of help, which, if she had not remembered her former occupation, and wished us to forget it, would have been much more pressing.

CHAPTER VIII

"YOUR LADYSHIP"

EARLY the next morning—directly after twelve—Miss Pole made her appearance at Miss Matty's. Some very trifling piece of business was alleged as a reason for the call; but there was evidently something behind. At last out it came.

"By the way, you'll think I'm strangely ignorant; but, do you really know, I am puzzled how we ought to address Lady Glenmire. Do you say, 'Your ladyship,' where you would say 'you' to a common person? I have been puzzling all morning; and are we to say 'My lady,' instead of 'Ma'am?' Now you knew Lady Arley—will you kindly tell me the most correct way of speaking to the peerage?"

Poor Miss Matty! she took off her spectacles and she put them on again—but how Lady Arley was addressed, she could not remember.

"It is so long ago," she said. "Dear! dear! how stupid I am! I don't think I ever saw her more than twice. I know we used to call Sir Peter 'Sir Peter'—but he came much oftener to see us than Lady Arley did. Deborah would have known in a minute. 'My lady'—'your ladyship.' It sounds very strange, and as if it was not natural. I never thought of it before; but, now you have named it, I am all in a puzzle."

It was very certain Miss Pole would obtain no wise

decision from Miss Matty, who got more bewildered every moment, and more perplexed as to etiquettes of address.

"Well, I really think," said Miss Pole, "I had better just go and tell Mrs. Forrester about our little difficulty. One sometimes grows nervous; and yet one would not have Lady Glenmire think we were quite ignorant of the etiquettes of high life in Cranford."

"And will you just step in here, dear Miss Pole, as you come back, please, and tell me what you decide upon? Whatever you and Mrs. Forrester fix upon, will be quite right, I'm sure. 'Lady Arley,' 'Sir Peter,'" said Miss Matty to herself, trying to recall the old forms of words.

"Who is Lady Glenmire?" asked I.

"Oh, she's the widow of Mr. Jamieson—that's Mrs. Jamieson's late husband you know—widow of his eldest brother. Mrs. Jamieson was a Miss Walker, daughter of Governor Walker. 'Your ladyship.' My dear, if they fix on that way of speaking, you must just let me practise a little on you first, for I shall feel so foolish and hot saying it the first time to Lady Glenmire."

It was really a relief to Miss Matty when Mrs. Jamieson came on a very unpolite errand. I notice that apathetic people have more quiet impertinence than others; and Mrs. Jamieson came now to insinuate pretty plainly that she did not particularly wish that the Cranford ladies should call upon her sister-in-law. I can hardly say how she made this clear; for I grew very indignant and warm, while with slow deliberation she was explaining her wishes to Miss Matty, who, a true lady herself, could hardly understand the feeling which made Mrs. Jamieson wish to appear to her noble sister-in-law as if she only visited "county" families. Miss Matty remained puzzled and perplexed long after I had found out the object of Mrs. Jamieson's visit.

When she did understand the drift of the honourable lady's call, it was pretty to see with what quiet dignity she received the intimation thus uncourteously given. She was not in the least hurt—she was of too gentle a spirit for that;

nor was she exactly conscious of disapproving of Mrs. Jamieson's conduct; but there was something of this feeling in her mind, I am sure, which made her pass from the subject to others in a less flurried and more composed manner than usual. Mrs. Jamieson was, indeed, the more flurried of the two, and I could see she was glad to take her leave.

A little while afterwards Miss Pole returned, red and indignant. "Well! to be sure! You've had Mrs. Jamieson here, I find from Martha; and we are not to call on Lady Glenmire. Yes! I met Mrs. Jamieson, half-way between here and Mrs. Forrester's, and she told me; she took me so by surprise, I had nothing to say. I wish I had thought of something very sharp and sarcastic; I dare say I shall to-night. And Lady Glenmire is but the widow of a Scotch baron after all! I went on to look at Mrs. Forrester's Peerage, to see who this lady was, that is to be kept under a glass case: widow of a Scotch peer—never sat in the House of Lords—and as poor as Job, I dare say; and she—fifth daughter of some Mr. Campbell or other. You are the daughter of a rector, at any rate, and related to the Arleys; and Sir Peter might have been Viscount Arley, every one says."

Miss Matty tried to soothe Miss Pole, but in vain. That lady, usually so kind and good-humoured, was now in a full flow of anger.

"And I went and ordered a cap this morning, to be quite ready," said she at last, letting out the secret which gave sting to Mrs. Jamieson's intimation. "Mrs. Jamieson shall see if it is so easy to get me to make fourth at a pool when she has none of her fine Scotch relations with her!"

In coming out of church, the first Sunday on which Lady Glenmire appeared in Cranford, we sedulously talked together, and turned our backs on Mrs. Jamieson and her guest. If we might not call on her, we would not even look at her, though we were dying with curiosity to know what she was like. We had the comfort of questioning Martha in the afternoon. Martha did not belong to a sphere of society

whose observation could be an implied compliment to Lady Glenmire, and Martha had made good use of her eyes.

"Well, ma'am! is it the little lady with Mrs. Jamieson you mean? I thought you would like more to know how young Mrs. Smith was dressed, her being a bride." (Mrs. Smith was the butcher's wife.)

Miss Pole said, "Good gracious me! as if we cared about a Mrs. Smith;" but was silent as Martha resumed her speech.

"The little lady in Mrs. Jamieson's pew had on, ma'am, rather an old black silk, and a shepherd's plaid cloak, ma'am, and very bright black eyes she had, ma'am, and a pleasant, sharp face; not over young, ma'am, but yet, I should guess, younger than Mrs. Jamieson herself. She looked up and down the church, like a bird, and nipped up her petticoats, when she came out, as quick and sharp as ever I see. I'll tell you what, ma'am, she's more like Mrs. Deacon, at the 'Coach and Horses,' nor any one."

"Hush, Martha!" said Miss Matty, "that's not respectful."

"Isn't it, ma'am? I beg pardon, I'm sure; but Jem Hearn said so as well. He said, she was just such a sharp, stirring sort of a body"——

"Lady," said Miss Pole.

"Lady—as Mrs. Deacon."

Another Sunday passed away, and we still averted our eyes from Mrs. Jamieson and her guest, and made remarks to ourselves that we thought were very severe—almost too much so. Miss Matty was evidently uneasy at our sarcastic manner of speaking.

Perhaps by this time Lady Glenmire had found out that Mrs. Jamieson's was not the gayest, liveliest house in the world; perhaps Mrs. Jamieson had found out that most of the county families were in London, and that those who remained in the country were not so alive as they might have been to the circumstance of Lady Glenmire being in their neighbourhood. Great events spring out of small

causes; so I will not pretend to say what induced Mrs. Jamieson to alter her determination of excluding the Cranford ladies, and send notes of invitation all round for a small party on the following Tuesday. Mr. Mulliner himself brought them round. He *would* always ignore the fact of there being a back-door to any house, and gave a louder rat-tat than his mistress, Mrs. Jamieson. He had three little notes, which he carried in a large basket, in order to impress his mistress with an idea of their great weight, though they might easily have gone into his waistcoat pocket.

Miss Matty and I quietly decided we would have a previous engagement at home: it was the evening on which Miss Matty usually made candle-lighters of all the notes and letters of the week; for on Mondays her accounts were always made straight—not a penny owing from the week before; so, by a natural arrangement, making candle-lighters fell upon a Tuesday evening, and gave us a legitimate excuse for declining Mrs. Jamieson's invitation. But before our answer was written, in came Miss Pole, with an open note in her hand.

"So!" she said. "Ah! I see you have got your note, too. Better late than never. I could have told my Lady Glenmire she would be glad enough of our society before a fortnight was over."

"Yes," said Miss Matty, "we're asked for Tuesday evening. And perhaps you would just kindly bring your work across and drink tea with us that night. It is my usual regular time for looking over the last week's bills, and notes, and letters, and making candle-lighters of them; but that does not seem quite reason enough for saying I have a previous engagement at home, though I meant to make it do. Now, if you would come, my conscience would be quite at ease, and luckily the note is not written yet."

I saw Miss Pole's countenance change while Miss Matty was speaking.

"Don't you mean to go then?" asked she.

"Oh, no!" said Miss Matty quietly. "You don't either, I suppose?"

"I don't know," replied Miss Pole. "Yes, I think I do," said she rather briskly; and, on seeing Miss Matty looked surprised, she added, "You see, one would not like Mrs. Jamieson to think that anything she could do, or say, was of consequence enough to give offence; it would be a kind of letting down of ourselves, that I, for one, should not like. It would be too flattering to Mrs. Jamieson if we allowed her to suppose that what she had said affected us a week, nay ten days, afterwards."

"Well! I suppose it is wrong to be hurt and annoyed so long about anything; and, perhaps, after all, she did not mean to vex us. But I must say, I could not have brought myself to say the things Mrs. Jamieson did about our not calling. I really don't think I shall go."

"Oh, come! Miss Matty, you must go; you know our friend Mrs. Jamieson is much more phlegmatic than most people, and does not enter into the little delicacies of feeling which you possess in so remarkable a degree."

"I thought you possessed them, too, that day Mrs. Jamieson called to tell us not to go," said Miss Matty innocently.

But Miss Pole, in addition to her delicacies of feeling, possessed a very smart cap, which she was anxious to show to an admiring world; and so she seemed to forget all her angry words uttered not a fortnight before, and to be ready to act on what she called the great Christian principle of "Forgive and forget;" and she lectured dear Miss Matty so long on this head that she absolutely ended by assuring her it was her duty, as a deceased rector's daughter, to buy a new cap and go to the party at Mrs. Jamieson's. So "we were most happy to accept," instead of "regretting that we were obliged to decline."

The expenditure on dress in Cranford was principally in that one article referred to. If the heads were buried in smart new caps, the ladies were like ostriches, and cared not

what became of their bodies. Old gowns, white and venerable collars, any number of brooches, up and down and everywhere (some with dogs' eyes painted in them; some that were like small picture-frames with mausoleums and weeping-willows neatly executed in hair inside; some, again, with miniatures of ladies and gentlemen sweetly smiling out of a nest of stiff muslin), old brooches for a permanent ornament, and new caps to suit the fashion of the day—the ladies of Cranford always dressed with chaste elegance and propriety, as Miss Barker once prettily expressed it.

And with three new caps, and a greater array of brooches than had ever been seen together at one time since Cranford was a town, did Mrs. Forrester, and Miss Matty, and Miss Pole appear on that memorable Tuesday evening. I counted seven brooches myself on Miss Pole's dress. Two were fixed negligently in her cap (one was a butterfly made of Scotch pebbles, which a vivid imagination might believe to be the real insect); one fastened her net neck-kerchief; one her collar; one ornamented the front of her gown, midway between her throat and waist; and another adorned the point of her stomacher. Where the seventh was I have forgotten, but it was somewhere about her, I am sure.

But I am getting on too fast, in describing the dresses of the company. I should first relate the gathering on the way to Mrs. Jamieson's. That lady lived in a large house just outside the town. A road which had known what it was to be a street ran right before the house, which opened out upon it without any intervening garden or court. Whatever the sun was about, he never shone on the front of that house. To be sure, the living-rooms were at the back, looking on to a pleasant garden; the front windows only belonged to kitchens and housekeepers' rooms, and pantries, and in one of them Mr. Mulliner was reported to sit. Indeed, looking askance, we often saw the back of a head covered with hair powder, which also extended itself over his coat-collar down to his very waist; and this imposing back was always engaged in reading the *St. James's Chronicle*, opened wide, which,

in some degree, accounted for the length of time the said newspaper was in reaching us—equal subscribers with Mrs. Jamieson, though, in right of her honourableness, she always had the reading of it first. This very Tuesday, the delay in forwarding the last number had been particularly aggravating; just when both Miss Pole and Miss Matty, the former more especially, had been wanting to see it, in order to coach up the Court news ready for the evening's interview with aristocracy. Miss Pole told us she had absolutely taken time by the forelock, and been dressed by five o'clock, in order to be ready if the *St. James's Chronicle* should come in at the last moment—the very *St. James's Chronicle* which the powdered head was tranquilly and composedly reading as we passed the accustomed window this evening.

"The impudence of the man!" said Miss Pole, in a low indignant whisper. "I should like to ask him whether his mistress pays her quarter-share for his exclusive use."

We looked at her in admiration of the courage of her thought; for Mr. Mulliner was an object of great awe to all of us. He seemed never to have forgotten his condescension in coming to live at Cranford. Miss Jenkyns, at times, had stood forth as the undaunted champion of her sex, and spoken to him on terms of equality; but even Miss Jenkyns could get no higher. In his pleasantest and most gracious moods he looked like a sulky cockatoo. He did not speak except in gruff monosyllables. He would wait in the hall when we begged him not to wait, and then look deeply offended because we had kept him there, while, with trembling, hasty hands we prepared ourselves for appearing in company.

Miss Pole ventured on a small joke as we went upstairs, intended, though addressed to us, to afford Mr. Mulliner some slight amusement. We all smiled, in order to seem as if we felt at our ease, and timidly looked for Mr. Mulliner's sympathy. Not a muscle of that wooden face had relaxed; and we were grave in an instant.

Mrs. Jamieson's drawing-room was cheerful: the evening

sun came streaming into it, and the large square window was clustered round with flowers. The furniture was white and gold; not the later style, Louis Quatorze, I think they call it, all shells and twirls; no, Mrs. Jamieson's chairs and tables had not a curve or bend about them. The chair and table legs diminished as they neared the ground, and were straight and square in all their corners. The chairs were all a-row against the walls, with the exception of four or five which stood in a circle round the fire. They were railed with white bars across the back, and knobbed with gold; neither the railings nor the knobs invited to ease. There was a japanned table devoted to literature, on which lay a Bible, a Peerage, and a Prayer-Book. There was another square Pembroke table dedicated to the Fine Arts, on which were a kaleidoscope, conversation-cards, puzzle-cards (tied together to an interminable length with faded pink satin ribbon), and a box painted in fond imitation of the drawings which decorate tea-chests. Carlo lay on the worsted-worked rug, and ungraciously barked at us as we entered. Mrs. Jamieson stood up, giving us each a torpid smile of welcome, and looking helplessly beyond us at Mr. Mulliner, as if she hoped he would place us in chairs, for, if he did not, she never could. I suppose he thought we could find our way to the circle round the fire, which reminded me of Stonehenge, I don't know why. Lady Glenmire came to the rescue of our hostess, and, somehow or other, we found ourselves for the first time placed agreeably, and not formally, in Mrs. Jamieson's house. Lady Glenmire, now we had time to look at her, proved to be a bright little woman of middle age, who had been very pretty in the days of her youth, and who was even yet very pleasant-looking. I saw Miss Pole appraising her dress in the first five minutes, and I take her word when she said the next day—

"My dear! ten pounds would have purchased every stitch she had on—lace and all."

It was pleasant to suspect that a peeress could be poor, and partly reconciled us to the fact that her husband had

never sat in the House of Lords; which, when we first heard of it, seemed a kind of swindling us out of our respect on false pretences; a sort of "A Lord and No Lord" business.

We were all very silent at first. We were thinking what we could talk about, that should be high enough to interest My Lady. There had been a rise in the price of sugar, which, as preserving-time was near, was a piece of intelligence to all our housekeeping hearts, and would have been the natural topic if Lady Glenmire had not been by. But we were not sure if the peerage ate preserves—much less knew how they were made. At last, Miss Pole, who had always a great deal of courage and *savoir faire*, spoke to Lady Glenmire, who on her part had seemed just as much puzzled to know how to break the silence as we were.

"Has your ladyship been to Court lately?" asked she; and then gave a little glance round at us, half timid and half triumphant, as much as to say, "See how judiciously I have chosen a subject befitting the rank of the stranger."

"I never was there in my life," said Lady Glenmire, with a broad Scotch accent, but in a very sweet voice. And then, as if she had been too abrupt, she added: "We very seldom went to London—only twice, in fact, during all my married life; and before I was married my father had far too large a family" (fifth daughter of Mr. Campbell was in all our minds, I am sure) "to take us often from our home, even to Edinburgh. Ye'll have been in Edinburgh, maybe?" said she, suddenly brightening up with the hope of a common interest. We had none of us been there; but Miss Pole had an uncle who once had passed a night there, which was very pleasant.

Mrs. Jamieson, meanwhile, was absorbed in wonder why Mr. Mulliner did not bring the tea; and at length the wonder oozed out of her mouth.

"I had better ring the bell, my dear, had not I?" said Lady Glenmire briskly.

"No—I think not—Mulliner does not like to be hurried."

We should have liked our tea, for we dined at an earlier hour than Mrs. Jamieson. I suspect Mr. Mulliner had to

finish the *St. James's Chronicle* before he chose to trouble himself about tea. His mistress fidgeted and fidgeted, and kept saying, "I can't think why Mulliner does not bring tea. I can't think what he can be about." And Lady Glenmire at last grew quite impatient, but it was a pretty kind of impatience after all; and she rang the bell rather sharply, on receiving a half-permission from her sister-in-law to do so. Mr. Mulliner appeared in dignified surprise. "Oh!" said Mrs. Jamieson, "Lady Glenmire rang the bell; I believe it was for tea."

In a few minutes tea was brought. Very delicate was the china, very old the plate, very thin the bread and butter, and very small the lumps of sugar. Sugar was evidently Mrs. Jamieson's favourite economy. I question if the little filigree sugar-tongs, made something like scissors, could have opened themselves wide enough to take up an honest, vulgar good-sized piece; and when I tried to seize two little minnikin pieces at once, so as not to be detected in too many returns to the sugar-basin, they absolutely dropped one, with a little sharp clatter, quite in a malicious and unnatural manner. But before this happened, we had had a slight disappointment. In the little silver jug was cream, in the larger one was milk. As soon as Mr. Mulliner came in, Carlo began to beg, which was a thing our manners forbade us to do, though I am sure we were just as hungry; and Mrs. Jamieson said she was certain we would excuse her if she gave her poor dumb Carlo his tea first. She accordingly mixed a saucerful for him, and put it down for him to lap; and then she told us how intelligent and sensible the dear little fellow was; he knew cream quite well, and constantly refused tea with only milk in it: so the milk was left for us; but we silently thought we were quite as intelligent and sensible as Carlo, and felt as if insult were added to injury when we were called upon to admire the gratitude evinced by his wagging his tail for the cream which should have been ours.

After tea we thawed down into common-life subjects. We were thankful to Lady Glenmire for having proposed

some more bread and butter, and this mutual want made us better acquainted with her than we should ever have been with talking about the Court, though Miss Pole did say she had hoped to know how the dear Queen was from some one who had seen her.

The friendship begun over bread and butter extended on to cards. Lady Glenmire played Preference to admiration, and was a complete authority as to Ombre and Quadrille. Even Miss Pole quite forgot to say "my lady," and "your ladyship," and said "Basto! ma'am;" "you have Spadille, I believe," just as quietly as if we had never held the great Cranford parliament on the subject of the proper mode of addressing a peeress.

As a proof of how thoroughly we had forgotten that we were in the presence of one who might have sat down to tea with a coronet, instead of a cap, on her head, Mrs. Forrester related a curious little fact to Lady Glenmire—an anecdote known to the circle of her intimate friends, but of which even Mrs. Jamieson was not aware. It related to some fine old lace, the sole relic of better days, which Lady Glenmire was admiring on Mrs. Forrester's collar.

"Yes," said that lady, "such lace cannot be got now for either love or money; made by the nuns abroad, they tell me. They say that they can't make it now, even there. But perhaps they can now they've passed the Catholic Emancipation Bill. I should not wonder. But, in the meantime, I treasure up my lace very much. I daren't even trust the washing of it to my maid" (the little charity schoolgirl I have named before, but who sounded well as "my maid"). "I always wash it myself. And once it had a narrow escape. Of course, your ladyship knows that such lace must never be starched or ironed. Some people wash it in sugar and water, and some in coffee, to make it the right yellow colour; but I myself have a very good receipt for washing it in milk, which stiffens it enough, and gives it a very good creamy colour. Well, ma'am, I had tacked it together (and the beauty of this fine lace is that, when it is

wet, it goes into a very little space), and put it to soak in milk, when, unfortunately, I left the room; on my return, I found pussy on the table, looking very like a thief, but gulping very uncomfortably, as if she was half-choked with something she wanted to swallow and could not. And, would you believe it? At first I pitied her, and said 'Poor pussy! poor pussy!' till, all at once, I looked and saw the cup of milk empty—cleaned out! 'You naughty cat!' said I; and I believe I was provoked enough to give her a slap, which did no good, but only helped the lace down—just as one slaps a choking child on the back. I could have cried, I was so vexed; but I determined I would not give the lace up without a struggle for it. I hoped the lace might disagree with her, at any rate; but it would have been too much for Job, if he had seen, as I did, that cat come in, quite placid and purring, not a quarter of an hour after, and almost expecting to be stroked. 'No, pussy!' said I, 'if you have any conscience you ought not to expect that!' And then a thought struck me; and I rang the bell for my maid, and sent her to Mr. Hoggins, with my compliments, and would he be kind enough to lend me one of his top-boots for an hour? I did not think there was anything odd in the message; but Jenny said the young men in the surgery laughed as if they would be ill at my wanting a top-boot. When it came, Jenny and I put pussy in, with her fore-feet straight down, so that they were fastened, and could not scratch, and we gave her a teaspoonful of currant-jelly in which (your ladyship must excuse me) I had mixed some tartar emetic. I shall never forget how anxious I was for the next half-hour. I took pussy to my own room, and spread a clean towel on the floor. I could have kissed her when she returned the lace to sight, very much as it had gone down. Jenny had boiling water ready, and we soaked it and soaked it, and spread it on a lavender-bush in the sun before I could touch it again, even to put it in milk. But now your ladyship would never guess that it had been in pussy's inside."

We found out, in the course of the evening, that Lady Glenmire was going to pay Mrs. Jamieson a long visit, as she had given up her apartments in Edinburgh, and had no ties to take her back there in a hurry. On the whole, we were rather glad to hear this, for she had made a pleasant impression upon us; and it was also very comfortable to find, from things which dropped out in the course of conversation, that, in addition to many other genteel qualities, she was far removed from the "vulgarity of wealth."

"Don't you find it very unpleasant walking?" asked Mrs. Jamieson, as our respective servants were announced. It was a pretty regular question from Mrs. Jamieson, who had her own carriage in the coach-house, and always went out in a sedan-chair to the very shortest distances. The answers were nearly as much a matter of course.

"Oh dear, no! it is so pleasant and still at night!" "Such a refreshment after the excitement of a party!" "The stars are so beautiful!" This last was from Miss Matty.

"Are you fond of astronomy?" Lady Glenmire asked.

"Not very," replied Miss Matty, rather confused at the moment to remember which was astronomy and which was astrology—but the answer was true under either circumstance, for she read, and was slightly alarmed at Francis Moore's astrological predictions; and, as to astronomy, in a private and confidential conversation, she had told me she never could believe that the earth was moving constantly, and that she would not believe it if she could, it made her feel so tired and dizzy whenever she thought about it.

In our pattens we picked our way home with extra care that night, so refined and delicate were our perceptions after drinking tea with "my lady."

CHAPTER IX

SIGNOR BRUNONI

Soon after the events of which I gave an account in my last paper, I was summoned home by my father's illness; and for a time I forgot, in anxiety about him, to wonder how my dear friends at Cranford were getting on, or how Lady Glenmire could reconcile herself to the dulness of the long visit which she was still paying to her sister-in-law, Mrs. Jamieson. When my father grew a little stronger I accompanied him to the seaside; so that altogether I seemed banished from Cranford, and was deprived of the opportunity of hearing any chance intelligence of the dear little town for the greater part of that year.

Late in November—when we had returned home again, and my father was once more in good health—I received a letter from Miss Matty; and a very mysterious letter it was. She began many sentences without ending them, running them one into another, in much the same confused sort of way in which written words run together on blotting-paper. All I could make out was that, if my father was better (which she hoped he was), and would take warning and wear a great-coat from Michaelmas to Lady-day, if turbans were in fashion, could I tell her? Such a piece of gaiety was going to happen as had not been seen or known of since Wombwell's lions came, when one of them ate a little child's arm; and she was, perhaps, too old to care about dress, but a new cap she must have; and, having heard that turbans were worn, and some of the county families likely to come, she would like to look tidy, if I would bring her a cap from the milliner I employed; and oh, dear! how careless of her to forget that she wrote to beg I would come and pay her a visit next Tuesday; when she hoped to have something to offer me in the way of amusement, which she would not

now more particularly describe, only sea-green was her favourite colour. So she ended her letter; but in a P.S. she added, she thought she might as well tell me what was the peculiar attraction to Cranford just now; Signor Brunoni was going to exhibit his wonderful magic in the Cranford Assembly Rooms on Wednesday and Friday evening in the following week.

I was very glad to accept the invitation from my dear Miss Matty, independently of the conjuror, and most particularly anxious to prevent her from disfiguring her small, gentle, mousey face with a great Saracen's head turban; and accordingly, I bought her a pretty, neat, middle-aged cap, which, however, was rather a disappointment to her when, on my arrival, she followed me into my bedroom, ostensibly to poke the fire, but in reality, I do believe, to see if the sea-green turban was not inside the cap-box with which I had travelled. It was in vain that I twirled the cap round on my hand to exhibit back and side fronts: her heart had been set upon a turban, and all she could do was to say, with resignation in her look and voice—

"I am sure you did your best, my dear. It is just like the caps all the ladies in Cranford are wearing, and they have had theirs for a year, I dare say. I should have liked something newer, I confess—something more like the turbans Miss Betty Barker tells me Queen Adelaide wears; but it is very pretty, my dear. And I dare say lavender will wear better than sea-green. Well, after all, what is dress, that we should care about it? You'll tell me if you want anything, my dear. Here is the bell. I suppose turbans have not got down to Drumble yet?"

So saying, the dear old lady gently bemoaned herself out of the room, leaving me to dress for the evening, when, as she informed me, she expected Miss Pole and Mrs. Forrester, and she hoped I should not feel myself too much tired to join the party. Of course I should not; and I made some haste to unpack and arrange my dress; but, with all my speed, I heard the arrivals and the buzz of conversation in

the next room before I was ready. Just as I opened the door, I caught the words, "I was foolish to expect anything very genteel out of the Drumble shops; poor girl! she did her best, I've no doubt." But, for all that, I had rather that she blamed Drumble and me than disfigured herself with a turban.

Miss Pole was always the person, in the trio of Cranford ladies now assembled, to have had adventures. She was in the habit of spending the morning in rambling from shop to shop, not to purchase anything (except an occasional reel of cotton, or a piece of tape), but to see the new articles and report upon them, and to collect all the stray pieces of intelligence in the town. She had a way, too, of demurely popping hither and thither into all sorts of places to gratify her curiosity on any point—a way which, if she had not looked so very genteel and prim, might have been considered impertinent. And now, by the expressive way in which she cleared her throat, and waited for all minor subjects (such as caps and turbans) to be cleared off the course, we knew she had something very particular to relate, when the due pause came—and I defy any people possessed of common modesty to keep up a conversation long, where one among them sits up aloft in silence, looking down upon all the things they chance to say as trivial and contemptible compared to what they could disclose, if properly entreated. Miss Pole began—

"As I was stepping out of Gordon's shop to-day, I chanced to go into the 'George' (my Betty has a second-cousin who is chambermaid there, and I thought Betty would like to hear how she was), and, not seeing any one about, I strolled up the staircase, and found myself in the passage leading to the Assembly Room (you and I remember the Assembly Room, I am sure, Miss Matty! and the menuets de la cour!); so I went on, not thinking of what I was about, when, all at once, I perceived that I was in the middle of the preparations for to-morrow night—the room being divided with great clothes-maids, over which Crosby's men were tacking red flannel; very dark and odd it seemed;

it quite bewildered me, and I was going on behind the screens, in my absence of mind, when a gentleman (quite the gentleman, I can assure you) stepped forwards and asked if I had any business he could arrange for me. He spoke such pretty broken English, I could not help thinking of Thaddeus of Warsaw, and the Hungarian Brothers, and Santo Sebastiani; and, while I was busy picturing his past life to myself, he had bowed me out of the room. But wait a minute! You have not heard half my story yet! I was going downstairs, when who should I meet but Betty's second-cousin. So, of course, I stopped to speak to her for Betty's sake; and she told me that I had really seen the conjuror—the gentleman who spoke broken English was Signor Brunoni himself. Just at this moment he passed us on the stairs, making such a graceful bow! in reply to which I dropped a curtsey—all foreigners have such polite manners, one catches something of it. But, when he had gone downstairs, I bethought me that I had dropped my glove in the Assembly Room (it was safe in my muff all the time, but I never found it till afterwards); so I went back, and, just as I was creeping up the passage left on one side of the great screen that goes nearly across the room, who should I see but the very same gentleman that had met me before, and passed me on the stairs, coming now forwards from the inner part of the room, to which there is no entrance—you remember, Miss Matty—and just repeating, in his pretty broken English, the inquiry if I had any business there—I don't mean that he put it quite so bluntly, but he seemed very determined that I should not pass the screen—so, of course, I explained about my glove, which, curiously enough, I found at that very moment."

Miss Pole, then, had seen the conjuror—the real, live conjuror! and numerous were the questions we all asked her. "Had he a beard?" "Was he young, or old?" "Fair, or dark?" "Did he look"—(unable to shape my question prudently, I put it in another form)—"How did he look?" In short, Miss Pole was the heroine of the evening,

owing to her morning's encounter. If she was not the rose (that is to say, the conjuror), she had been near it.

Conjuration, sleight of hand, magic, witchcraft, were the subjects of the evening. Miss Pole was slightly sceptical, and inclined to think there might be a scientific solution found for even the proceedings of the Witch of Endor. Mrs. Forrester believed everything, from ghosts to death-watches. Miss Matty ranged between the two—always convinced by the last speaker. I think she was naturally more inclined to Mrs. Forrester's side, but a desire of proving herself a worthy sister to Miss Jenkyns kept her equally balanced—Miss Jenkyns, who would never allow a servant to call the little rolls of tallow that formed themselves round candles "winding-sheets," but insisted on their being spoken of as "roley-poleys!" A sister of hers to be superstitious! It would never do.

After tea, I was despatched downstairs into the dining-parlour for that volume of the old Encyclopædia which contained the nouns beginning with C, in order that Miss Pole might prime herself with scientific explanations for the tricks of the following evening. It spoilt the pool at Preference which Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester had been looking forward to, for Miss Pole became so much absorbed in her subject, and the plates by which it was illustrated, that we felt it would be cruel to disturb her otherwise than by one or two well-timed yawns, which I threw in now and then, for I was really touched by the meek way in which the two ladies were bearing their disappointment. But Miss Pole only read the more zealously, imparting to us no more interesting information than this:—

"Ah! I see; I comprehend perfectly. A represents the ball. Put A between B and D—no! between C and F, and turn the second joint of the third finger of your left hand over the wrist of your right H. Very clear indeed! My dear Mrs. Forrester, conjuring and witchcraft is a mere affair of the alphabet. Do let me read you this one passage."

Mrs. Forrester implored Miss Pole to spare her, saying from a child upwards, she never could understand being read aloud to; and I dropped the pack of cards, which I had been shuffling very audibly, and by this discreet movement I obliged Miss Pole to perceive that Preference was to have been the order of the evening, and to propose, rather unwillingly, that the pool should commence. The pleasant brightness that stole over the other two ladies' faces on this! Miss Matty had one or two twinges of self-reproach for having interrupted Miss Pole in her studies: and did not remember her cards well, or give her full attention to the game, until she had soothed her conscience by offering to lend the volume of the Encyclopædia to Miss Pole, who accepted it thankfully, and said Betty should take it home when she came with the lantern.

The next evening we were all in a little gentle flutter at the idea of the gaiety before us. Miss Matty went up to dress betimes, and hurried me until I was ready, when we found we had an hour-and-a-half to wait before the "doors opened at seven precisely." And we had only twenty yards to go! However, as Miss Matty said, it would not do to get too much absorbed in anything, and forget the time; so she thought we had better sit quietly, without lighting the candles, till five minutes to seven. So Miss Matty dozed, and I knitted.

At length we set off; and at the door, under the carriage-way at the "George," we met Mrs. Forrester and Miss Pole: the latter was discussing the subject of the evening with more vehemence than ever, and throwing A's and B's at our heads like hailstones. She had even copied one or two of the "receipts"—as she called them—for the different tricks, on backs of letters, ready to explain and to detect Signor Brunoni's arts.

We went into the cloak-room adjoining the Assembly Room; Miss Matty gave a sigh or two to her departed youth, and the remembrance of the last time she had been there, as she adjusted her pretty new cap before the strange,

quaint old mirror in the cloak-room. The Assembly Room had been added to the inn, about a hundred years before, by the different county families, who met together there once a month during the winter to dance and play at cards. Many a county beauty had first swung through the minuet that she afterwards danced before Queen Charlotte in this very room. It was said that one of the Gunnings had graced the apartment with her beauty; it was certain that a rich and beautiful widow, Lady Williams, had here been smitten with the noble figure of a young artist, who was staying with some family in the neighbourhood for professional purposes, and accompanied his patrons to the Cranford Assembly. And a pretty bargain poor Lady Williams had of her handsome husband, if all tales were true. Now, no beauty blushed and dimpled along the sides of the Cranford Assembly Room; no handsome artist won hearts by his bow, *chapeau bras* in hand; the old room was dingy; the salmon-coloured paint had faded into a drab; great pieces of plaster had chipped off from the white wreaths and festoons on its walls; but still a mouldy odour of aristocracy lingered about the place, and a dusty recollection of the days that were gone made Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester bridle up as they entered, and walk mincingly up the room, as if there were a number of genteel observers, instead of two little boys with a stick of toffy between them with which to beguile the time.

We stopped short at the second front row; I could hardly understand why, until I heard Miss Pole ask a stray waiter if any of the county families were expected; and when he shook his head, and believed not, Mrs. Forrester and Miss Matty moved forwards, and our party represented a conversational square. The front row was soon augmented and enriched by Lady Glenmire and Mrs. Jamieson. We six occupied the two front rows, and our aristocratic seclusion was respected by the groups of shopkeepers who strayed in from time to time and huddled together on the back benches. At least I conjectured so, from the noise they made, and the

sonorous bumps they gave in sitting down; but when, in weariness of the obstinate green curtain that would not draw up, but would stare at me with two odd eyes, seen through holes, as in the old tapestry story, I would fain have looked round at the merry chattering people behind me, Miss Pole clutched my arm, and begged me not to turn, for "it was not the thing." What "the thing" was, I never could find out, but it must have been something eminently dull and tiresome. However, we all sat eyes right, square front, gazing at the tantalising curtain, and hardly speaking intelligibly, we were so afraid of being caught in the vulgarity of making any noise in a place of public amusement. Mrs. Jamieson was the most fortunate, for she fell asleep.

At length the eyes disappeared—the curtain quivered—one side went up before the other, which stuck fast; it was dropped again, and, with a fresh effort, and a vigorous pull from some unseen hand, it flew up, revealing to our sight a magnificent gentleman in the Turkish costume, seated before a little table, gazing at us (I should have said with the same eyes that I had last seen through the hole in the curtain) with calm and condescending dignity, "like a being of another sphere," as I heard a sentimental voice ejaculate behind me.

"That's not Signor Brunoni!" said Miss Pole decidedly: and so audibly that I am sure he heard, for he glanced down over his flowing beard at our party with an air of mute reproach. "Signor Brunoni had no beard—but perhaps he'll come soon." So she lulled herself into patience. Meanwhile, Miss Matty had reconnoitred through her eye-glass, wiped it, and looked again. Then she turned round, and said to me, in a kind, mild, sorrowful tone—

"You see, my dear, turbans *are* worn."

But we had no time for more conversation. The Grand Turk, as Miss Pole chose to call him, arose and announced himself as Signor Brunoni.

"I don't believe him!" exclaimed Miss Pole, in a defiant manner. He looked at her again, with the same dignified

upbraiding in his countenance. "I don't!" she repeated more positively than ever. "Signor Brunoni had not got that muffy sort of thing about his chin, but looked like a close-shaved Christian gentleman."

Miss Pole's energetic speeches had the good effect of wakening up Mrs. Jamieson, who opened her eyes wide, in sign of the deepest attention—a proceeding which silenced Miss Pole and encouraged the Grand Turk to proceed, which he did in very broken English—so broken that there was no cohesion between the parts of his sentences; a fact which he himself perceived at last, and so left off speaking and proceeded to action.

Now we *were* astonished. How he did his tricks I could not imagine; no, not even when Miss Pole pulled out her pieces of paper and began reading aloud—or at least in a very audible whisper—the separate "receipts" for the most common of his tricks. If ever I saw a man frown and look enraged, I saw the Grand Turk frown at Miss Pole; but, as she said, what could be expected but unchristian looks from a Mussulman? If Miss Pole were sceptical, and more engrossed with her receipts and diagrams than with his tricks, Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester were mystified and perplexed to the highest degree. Mrs. Jamieson kept taking her spectacles off and wiping them, as if she thought it was something defective in them which made the legerdemain; and Lady Glenmire, who had seen many curious sights in Edinburgh, was very much struck with the tricks, and would not at all agree with Miss Pole, who declared that anybody could do them with a little practice, and that she would, herself, undertake to do all he did, with two hours given to study the Encyclopædia and make her third finger flexible.

At last Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester became perfectly awe-stricken. They whispered together. I sat just behind them, so I could not help hearing what they were saying. Miss Matty asked Mrs. Forrester "if she thought it was quite right to have come to see such things? She could not help fearing they were lending encouragement to something

that was not quite "—— A little shake of the head filled up the blank. Mrs. Forrester replied, that the same thought had crossed her mind; she, too, was feeling very uncomfortable, it was so very strange. She was quite certain that it was her pocket-handkerchief which was in that loaf just now; and it had been in her own hand not five minutes before. She wondered who had furnished the bread? She was sure it could not be Dakin, because he was the churchwarden. Suddenly Miss Matty half-turned towards me—

"Will you look, my dear—you are a stranger in the town, and it won't give rise to unpleasant reports—will you just look round and see if the rector is here? If he is, I think we may conclude that this wonderful man is sanctioned by the Church, and that will be a great relief to my mind."

I looked, and I saw the tall, thin, dry, dusty rector, sitting surrounded by National School boys, guarded by troops of his own sex from any approach of the many Cranford spinsters. His kind face was all agape with broad smiles, and the boys around him were in chinks of laughing. I told Miss Matty that the Church was smiling approval, which set her mind at ease.

I have never named Mr. Hayter, the rector, because I, as a well-to-do and happy young woman, never came in contact with him. He was an old bachelor, but as afraid of matrimonial reports getting abroad about him as any girl of eighteen: and he would rush into a shop, or dive down an entry, sooner than encounter any of the Cranford ladies in the street; and, as for the Preference parties, I did not wonder at his not accepting invitations to them. To tell the truth, I always suspected Miss Pole of having given very vigorous chase to Mr. Hayter when he first came to Cranford; and not the less, because now she appeared to share so vividly in his dread lest her name should ever be coupled with his. He found all his interests among the poor and helpless; he had treated the National School boys this very night to the performance; and virtue was for once its own reward, for they guarded him right and left, and clung round

him as if he had been the queen-bee and they the swarm. He felt so safe in their environment that he could even afford to give our party a bow as we filed out. Miss Pole ignored his presence, and pretended to be absorbed in convincing us that we had been cheated, and had not seen Signor Brunoni after all.

CHAPTER X

THE PANIC

I THINK a series of circumstances dated from Signor Brunoni's visit to Cranford, which seemed at the time connected in our minds with him, though I don't know that he had anything really to do with them. All at once all sorts of uncomfortable rumours got afloat in the town. There were one or two robberies—real *bonâ fide* robberies; men had up before the magistrates and committed for trial—and that seemed to make us all afraid of being robbed; and for a long time, at Miss Matty's, I know we used to make a regular expedition all round the kitchens and cellars every night, Miss Matty leading the way, armed with the poker, I following with the hearth-brush, and Martha carrying the shovel and fire-irons with which to sound the alarm; and by the accidental hitting together of them she often frightened us so much that we bolted ourselves up, all three together, in the back-kitchen, or store-room, or wherever we happened to be, till, when our affright was over, we recollected ourselves, and set out afresh with double valiance. By day we heard strange stories from the shopkeepers and cottagers, of carts that went about in the dead of night, drawn by horses shod with felt, and guarded by men in dark clothes, going round the town, no doubt in search of some unwatched house or some unfastened door.

Miss Pole, who affected great bravery herself, was the

principal person to collect and arrange these reports so as to make them assume their most fearful aspect. But we discovered that she had begged one of Mr. Hoggins's worn-out hats to hang up in her lobby, and we (at least I) had doubts as to whether she really would enjoy the little adventure of having her house broken into, as she protested she should. Miss Matty made no secret of being an arrant coward, but she went regularly through her housekeeper's duty of inspection—only the hour for this became earlier and earlier, till at last we went the rounds at half-past six, and Miss Matty adjourned to bed soon after seven, "in order to get the night over the sooner."

Cranford had so long piqued itself on being an honest and moral town that it had grown to fancy itself too genteel and well-bred to be otherwise, and felt the stain upon its character at this time doubly. But we comforted ourselves with the assurance which we gave to each other that the robberies could never have been committed by any Cranford person; it must have been a stranger or strangers who brought this disgrace upon the town, and occasioned as many precautions as if we were living among the Red Indians or the French.

This last comparison of our nightly state of defence and fortification was made by Mrs. Forrester, whose father had served under General Burgoyne in the American war, and whose husband had fought the French in Spain. She indeed inclined to the idea that, in some way, the French were connected with the small thefts, which were ascertained facts, and the burglaries and highway robberies, which were rumours. She had been deeply impressed with the idea of French spies at some time in her life; and the notion could never be fairly eradicated, but sprang up again from time to time. And now her theory was this:—The Cranford people respected themselves too much, and were too grateful to the aristocracy who were so kind as to live near the town, ever to disgrace their bringing up by being dishonest or immoral; therefore, we must believe that the robbers were strangers—

if strangers, why not foreigners?—if foreigners, who so likely as the French? Signor Brunoni spoke broken English like a Frenchman; and, though he wore a turban like a Turk, Mrs. Forrester had seen a print of Madame de Staël with a turban on, and another of Mr. Denon in just such a dress as that in which the conjuror had made his appearance, showing clearly that the French, as well as the Turks, wore turbans. There could be no doubt. Signor Brunoni was a Frenchman—a French spy come to discover the weak and undefended places of England, and doubtless he had his accomplices. For her part, she, Mrs. Forrester, had always had her own opinion of Miss Pole's adventure at the "George Inn"—seeing two men where only one was believed to be. French people had ways and means which, she was thankful to say, the English knew nothing about; and she had never felt quite easy in her mind about going to see that conjuror—it was rather too much like a forbidden thing, though the rector was there. In short, Mrs. Forrester grew more excited than we had ever known her before, and, being an officer's daughter and widow, we looked up to her opinion, of course.

Really I do not know how much was true or false in the reports which flew about like wildfire just at this time; but it seemed to me then that there was every reason to believe that at Mardon (a small town about eight miles from Cranford) houses and shops were entered by holes made in the walls, the bricks being silently carried away in the dead of the night, and all done so quietly that no sound was heard either in or out of the house. Miss Matty gave it up in despair when she heard of this. "What was the use," said she, "of locks and bolts, and bells to the windows, and going round the house every night? That last trick was fit for a conjuror. Now she did believe that Signor Brunoni was at the bottom of it."

On afternoon, about five o'clock, we were startled by a hasty knock at the door. Miss Matty bade me run and tell Martha on no account to open the door till she (Miss Matty)

had reconnoitred through the window; and she armed herself with a footstool to drop down on the head of the visitor, in case he should show a face covered with black crape, as he looked up in answer to her inquiry of who was there. But it was nobody but Miss Pole and Betty. The former came upstairs, carrying a little hand-basket, and she was evidently in a state of great agitation.

"Take care of that!" said she to me, as I offered to relieve her of her basket. "It's my plate. I am sure there is a plan to rob my house to-night. I am come to throw myself on your hospitality, Miss Matty. Betty is going to sleep with her cousin at the 'George.' I can sit up here all night if you will allow me; but my house is so far from any neighbours, and I don't believe we could be heard if we screamed ever so!"

"But," said Miss Matty, "what has alarmed you so much? Have you seen any men lurking about the house?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Miss Pole. "Two very bad-looking men have gone three times past the house, very slowly; and an Irish beggar-woman came not half-an-hour ago, and all but forced herself in past Betty, saying her children were starving, and she must speak to the mistress. You see, she said 'mistress,' though there was a hat hanging up in the hall, and it would have been more natural to have said 'master.' But Betty shut the door in her face, and came up to me, and we got the spoons together, and sat in the parlour-window watching till we saw Thomas Jones going from his work, when we called to him and asked him to take care of us into the town."

We might have triumphed over Miss Pole, who had professed such bravery until she was frightened; but we were too glad to perceive that she shared in the weaknesses of humanity to exult over her; and I gave up my room to her very willingly, and shared Miss Matty's bed for the night. But before we retired, the two ladies rummaged up, out of the recesses of their memory, such horrid stories of robbery and murder that I quite quaked in my shoes. Miss

Pole was evidently anxious to prove that such terrible events had occurred within her experience that she was justified in her sudden panic; and Miss Matty did not like to be outdone, and capped every story with one yet more horrible, till it reminded me, oddly enough, of an old story I had read somewhere, of a nightingale and a musician, who strove one against the other which could produce the most admirable music, till poor Philomel dropped down dead.

One of the stories that haunted me for a long time afterwards was of a girl who was left in charge of a great house in Cumberland on some particular fair-day, when the other servants all went off to the gaieties. The family were away in London, and a pedlar came by, and asked to leave his large and heavy pack in the kitchen, saying he would call for it again at night; and the girl (a gamekeeper's daughter), roaming about in search of amusement, chanced to hit upon a gun hanging up in the hall, and took it down to look at the chasing; and it went off through the open kitchen door, hit the pack, and a slow dark thread of blood came oozing out. (How Miss Pole enjoyed this part of the story, dwelling on each word as if she loved it!) She rather hurried over the further account of the girl's bravery, and I have but a confused idea that, somehow, she baffled the robbers with Italian irons, heated red-hot, and then restored to blackness by being dipped in grease.

We parted for the night with an awe-stricken wonder as to what we should hear of in the morning—and, on my part, with a vehement desire for the night to be over and gone; I was so afraid lest the robbers should have seen, from some dark lurking-place, that Miss Pole had carried off her plate, and thus have a double motive for attacking our house.

But until Lady Glenmire came to call next day we heard of nothing unusual. The kitchen fire-irons were in exactly the same position against the back door as when Martha and I had skilfully piled them up, like spillikins, ready to fall with an awful clatter if only a cat had touched the outside panels. I had wondered what we should all do if thus

awakened and alarmed, and had proposed to Miss Matty that we should cover up our faces under the bed-clothes, so that there should be no danger of the robbers thinking that we could identify them; but Miss Matty, who was trembling very much, scouted this idea, and said we owed it to society to apprehend them, and that she should certainly do her best to lay hold of them and lock them up in the garret till morning.

When Lady Glenmire came, we almost felt jealous of her. Mrs. Jamieson's house had really been attacked; at least there were men's footsteps to be seen on the flower borders, underneath the kitchen windows, "where nae men should be"; and Carlo had barked all through the night as if strangers were abroad. Mrs. Jamieson had been awakened by Lady Glenmire, and they had rung the bell which communicated with Mr. Mulliner's room in the third storey, and when his nightcapped head had appeared over the bannisters, in answer to the summons, they had told him of their alarm, and the reasons for it; whereupon he retreated into his bedroom, and locked the door (for fear of draughts, as he informed them in the morning), and opened the window, and called out valiantly to say, if the supposed robbers would come to him he would fight them; but, as Lady Glenmire observed, that was but poor comfort, since they would have to pass by Mrs. Jamieson's room and her own before they could reach him, and must be of a very pugnacious disposition indeed if they neglected the opportunities of robbery presented by the unguarded lower storeys, to go up to a garret, and there force a door in order to get at the champion of the house. Lady Glenmire, after waiting and listening for some time in the drawing-room, had proposed to Mrs. Jamieson that they should go to bed; but that lady said she should not feel comfortable unless she sat up and watched; and, accordingly, she packed herself warmly up on the sofa, where she was found by the housemaid, when she came into the room at six o'clock, fast asleep; but Lady Glenmire went to bed, and kept awake all night.

When Miss Pole heard of this, she nodded her head in great satisfaction. She had been sure we should hear of something happening in Cranford that night; and we had heard. It was clear enough they had first proposed to attack her house; but when they saw that she and Betty were on their guard, and had carried off the plate, they had changed their tactics and gone to Mrs. Jamieson's, and no one knew what might have happened if Carlo had not barked, like a good dog as he was!

Poor Carlo! his barking days were nearly over. Whether the gang who infested the neighbourhood were afraid of him, or whether they were revengeful enough, for the way in which he had baffled them on the night in question, to poison him; or whether, as some among the more uneducated people thought, he died of apoplexy, brought on by too much feeding and too little exercise: at any rate, it is certain that, two days after this eventful night, Carlo was found dead, with his poor little legs stretched out stiff in the attitude of running, as if by such unusual exertion he could escape the sure pursuer, Death.

We were all sorry for Carlo, the old familiar friend who had snapped at us for so many years; and the mysterious mode of his death made us very uncomfortable. Could Signor Brunoni be at the bottom of this? He had apparently killed a canary with only a word of command; his will seemed of deadly force; who knew but what he might yet be lingering in the neighbourhood willing all sorts of awful things!

We whispered these fancies among ourselves in the evenings; but in the mornings our courage came back with the daylight, and in a week's time we had got over the shock of Carlo's death; all but Mrs. Jamieson. She, poor thing, felt it as she had felt no event since her husband's death; indeed Miss Pole said, that as the Honourable Mr. Jamieson drank a good deal, and occasioned her much uneasiness, it was possible that Carlo's death might be the greater affliction. But there was always a tinge of cynicism in Miss Pole's

remarks. However, one thing was clear and certain—it was necessary for Mrs. Jamieson to have some change of scene; and Mr. Mulliner was very impressive on this point, shaking his head whenever we inquired after his mistress, and speaking of her loss of appetite and bad nights very ominously; and with justice too, for if she had two characteristics in her natural state of health they were a facility of eating and sleeping. If she could neither eat nor sleep, she must be indeed out of spirits and out of health.

Lady Glenmire (who had evidently taken very kindly to Cranford) did not like the idea of Mrs. Jamieson going to Cheltenham, and more than once insinuated pretty plainly that it was Mr. Mulliner's doing, who had been much alarmed on the occasion of the house being attacked, and since had said, more than once, that he felt it a very responsible charge to have to defend so many women. Be that as it might, Mrs. Jamieson went to Cheltenham, escorted by Mr. Mulliner; and Lady Glenmire remained in possession of the house, her ostensible office being to take care that the maid-servants did not pick up followers. She made a very pleasant-looking dragon; and, as soon as it was arranged for her stay in Cranford, she found out that Mrs. Jamieson's visit to Cheltenham was just the best thing in the world. She had let her house in Edinburgh, and was for the time houseless, so the charge of her sister-in-law's comfortable abode was very convenient and acceptable.

Miss Pole was very much inclined to instal herself as a heroine, because of the decided steps she had taken in flying from the two men and one woman, whom she entitled "that murderous gang." She described their appearance in glowing colours, and I noticed that every time she went over the story some fresh trait of villainy was added to their appearance. One was tall—he grew to be gigantic in height before we had done with him; he of course had black hair—and by-and-by it hung in elf-locks over his forehead and down his back. The other was short and broad—and a hump sprouted out on his shoulder before we heard the last of him;

he had red hair—which deepened into carroty; and she was almost sure he had a cast in the eye—a decided squint. As for the woman, her eyes glared, and she was masculine-looking—a perfect virago; most probably a man dressed in woman's clothes: afterwards, we heard of a beard on her chin, and a manly voice and a stride.

If Miss Pole was delighted to recount the events of that afternoon to all inquirers, others were not so proud of their adventures in the robbery line. Mr. Hoggins, the surgeon, had been attacked at his own door by two ruffians, who were concealed in the shadow of the porch, and so effectually silenced him that he was robbed in the interval between ringing his bell and the servant's answering it. Miss Pole was sure it would turn out that this robbery had been committed by "her men," and went the very day she heard the report to have her teeth examined, and to question Mr. Hoggins. She came to us afterwards; so we heard what she had heard, straight and direct from the source, while we were yet in the excitement and flutter of the agitation caused by the first intelligence; for the event had only occurred the night before.

"Well!" said Miss Pole, sitting down with the decision of a person who has made up her mind as to the nature of life and the world (and such people never tread lightly, or seat themselves without a bump), "well, Miss Matty! men will be men. Every mother's son of them wishes to be considered Samson and Solomon rolled into one—too strong ever to be beaten or discomfited—too wise ever to be outwitted. If you will notice, they have always foreseen events, though they never tell one for one's warning before the events happen. My father was a man, and I know the sex pretty well."

She had talked herself out of breath, and we should have been very glad to fill up the necessary pause as chorus, but we did not exactly know what to say, or which man had suggested this diatribe against the sex; so we only joined in generally, with a grave shake of the head, and a soft murmur of "They are very incomprehensible, certainly!"

"Now, only think," said she. "There, I have undergone the risk of having one of my remaining teeth drawn (for one is terribly at the mercy of any surgeon-dentist; and I, for one, always speak them fair till I have got my mouth out of their clutches), and, after all, Mr. Hoggins is too much of a man to own that he was robbed last night."

"Not robbed!" exclaimed the chorus.

"Don't tell me!" Miss Pole exclaimed, angry that we could be for a moment imposed upon. "I believe he was robbed, just as Betty told me, and he is ashamed to own it; and, to be sure, it was very silly of him to be robbed just at his own door; I dare say he feels that such a thing won't raise him in the eyes of Cranford society, and is anxious to conceal it—but he need not have tried to impose upon me, by saying I must have heard an exaggerated account of some petty theft of a neck of mutton, which, it seems, was stolen out of the safe in his yard last week; he had the impertinence to add, he believed that that was taken by the cat. I have no doubt, if I could get at the bottom of it, it was that Irishman dressed up in woman's clothes, who came spying about my house, with the story about the starving children."

After we had duly condemned the want of candour which Mr. Hoggins had evinced, and abused men in general, taking him for the representative and type, we got round to the subject about which we had been talking when Miss Pole came in: namely, how far, in the present disturbed state of the country, we could venture to accept an invitation which Miss Matty had just received from Mrs. Forrester, to come as usual and keep the anniversary of her wedding-day by drinking tea with her at five o'clock, and playing a quiet pool afterwards. Mrs. Forrester had said that she asked us with some diffidence, because the roads were, she feared, very unsafe. But she suggested that perhaps one of us would not object to take the sedan, and that the others, by walking briskly, might keep up with the long trot of the chairmen, and so we might all arrive safely at Over Place, a suburb of the town. (No; that is too large an expression: a small

cluster of houses separated from Cranford by about two hundred yards of a dark and lonely lane.) There was no doubt but that a similar note was awaiting Miss Pole at home; so her call was a very fortunate affair, as it enabled us to consult together. . . . We would all much rather have declined this invitation; but we felt that it would not be quite kind to Mrs. Forrester, who would otherwise be left to a solitary retrospect of her not very happy or fortunate life. Miss Matty and Miss Pole had been visitors on this occasion for many years, and now they gallantly determined to nail their colours to the mast, and to go through Darkness Lane rather than fail in loyalty to their friend.

But when the evening came, Miss Matty (for it was she who was voted into the chair, as she had a cold), before being shut down in the sedan, like jack-in-a-box, implored the chairmen, whatever might befall, not to run away and leave her fastened up there, to be murdered; and even after they had promised, I saw her tighten her features into the stern determination of a martyr, and she gave me a melancholy and ominous shake of the head through the glass. However, we got there safely, only rather out of breath, for it was who could trot hardest through Darkness Lane, and I am afraid poor Miss Matty was sadly jolted.

Mrs. Forrester had made extra preparations, in acknowledgment of our exertion in coming to see her through such dangers. The usual forms of genteel ignorance as to what her servants might send up were all gone through; and harmony and Preference seemed likely to be the order of the evening, but for an interesting conversation that began I don't know how, but which had relation, of course, to the robbers who infested the neighbourhood of Cranford.

Having braved the dangers of Darkness Lane, and thus having a little stock of reputation for courage to fall back upon; and also, I dare say, desirous of proving ourselves superior to men (*videlicet* Mr. Hoggins) in the article of candour, we began to relate our individual fears, and the private precautions we each of us took. I owned that my

pet apprehension was eyes—eyes looking at me, and watching me, glittering out from some dull, flat, wooden surface; and that if I dared to go up to my looking-glass when I was panic-stricken, I should certainly turn it round, with its back towards me, for fear of seeing eyes behind me looking out of the darkness. I saw Miss Matty nerving herself up for a confession; and at last out it came. She owned that, ever since she had been a girl, she had dreaded being caught by her last leg, just as she was getting into bed, by some one concealed under it. She said, when she was younger and more active, she used to take a flying leap from a distance, and so bring both her legs up safely into bed at once; but that this had always annoyed Deborah, who piqued herself upon getting into bed gracefully, and she had given it up in consequence. But now the old terror would often come over her, especially since Miss Pole's house had been attacked (we had got quite to believe in the fact of the attack having taken place), and yet it was very unpleasant to think of looking under a bed, and seeing a man concealed, with a great, fierce face staring out at you; so she had bethought herself of something—perhaps I had noticed that she had told Martha to buy her a penny ball, such as children play with—and now she rolled this ball under the bed every night: if it came out on the other side, well and good; if not she always took care to have her hand on the bell-rope, and meant to call out John and Harry, just as if she expected men-servants to answer her ring.

We all applauded this ingenious contrivance, and Miss Matty sank back into satisfied silence, with a look at Mrs. Forrester as if to ask for *her* private weakness.

Mrs. Forrester looked askance at Miss Pole, and tried to change the subject a little by telling us that she had borrowed a boy from one of the neighbouring cottages and promised his parents a hundredweight of coals at Christmas, and his supper every evening, for the loan of him at nights. She had instructed him in his possible duties when he first came; and, finding him sensible, she had given him the Major's

sword (the Major was her late husband), and desired him to put it very carefully behind his pillow at night, turning the edge towards the head of the pillow. He was a sharp lad, she was sure; for, spying out the Major's cocked hat, he had said, if he might have that to wear, he was sure he could frighten two Englishmen, or four Frenchmen, any day. But she had impressed upon him anew that he was to lose no time in putting on hats or anything else; but, if he heard any noise, he was to run at it with his drawn sword. On my suggesting that some accident might occur from such slaughterous and indiscriminate directions, and that he might rush on Jenny getting up to wash, and have spitted her before he had discovered that she was not a Frenchman, Mrs. Forrester said she did not think that that was likely, for he was a very sound sleeper, and generally had to be well shaken or cold-pigged in a morning before they could rouse him. She sometimes thought such dead sleep must be owing to the hearty suppers the poor lad ate, for he was half-starved at home, and she told Jenny to see that he got a good meal at night.

Still this was no confession of Mrs. Forrester's peculiar timidity, and we urged her to tell us what she thought would frighten her more than anything. She paused, and stirred the fire, and snuffed the candles, and then she said, in a sounding whisper—

"Ghosts!"

She looked at Miss Pole, as much as to say, she had declared it, and would stand by it. Such a look was a challenge in itself. Miss Pole came down upon her with indigestion, spectral illusions, optical delusions, and a great deal out of Dr. Ferrier and Dr. Hibbert besides. Miss Matty had rather a leaning to ghosts, as I have mentioned before, and what little she did say was all on Mrs. Forrester's side, who, emboldened by sympathy, protested that ghosts were a part of her religion; that surely she, the widow of a major in the army, knew what to be frightened at, and what not; in short, I never saw Mrs. Forrester so warm either before

or since, for she was a gentle, meek, enduring old lady in most things. Not all the elder-wine that ever was mulled could this night wash out the remembrance of this difference between Miss Pole and her hostess. Indeed, when the elder-wine was brought in, it gave rise to a new burst of discussion; for Jenny, the little maiden who staggered under the tray, had to give evidence of having seen a ghost with her own eyes, not so many nights ago, in Darkness Lane, the very lane we were to go through on our way home.

In spite of the uncomfortable feeling which this last consideration gave me, I could not help being amused at Jenny's position, which was exceedingly like that of a witness being examined and cross-examined by two counsel who are not at all scrupulous about asking leading questions. The conclusion I arrived at was, that Jenny had certainly seen something beyond what a fit of indigestion would have caused. A lady all in white, and without her head, was what she deposed and adhered to, supported by a consciousness of the secret sympathy of her mistress under the withering scorn with which Miss Pole regarded her. And not only she, but many others, had seen this headless lady, who sat by the roadside wringing her hands as in deep grief. Mrs. Forrester looked at us from time to time with an air of conscious triumph; but then she had not to pass through Darkness Lane before she could bury herself beneath her own familiar bed-clothes.

We preserved a discreet silence as to the headless lady while we were putting on our things to go home, for there was no knowing how near the ghostly head and ears might be, or what spiritual connection they might be keeping up with the unhappy body in Darkness Lane; and, therefore, even Miss Pole felt that it was as well not to speak lightly on such subjects, for fear of vexing or insulting that woebegone trunk. At least, so I conjecture; for, instead of the busy clatter usual in the operation, we tied on our cloaks as sadly as mutes at a funeral. Miss Matty drew the curtains round the windows of the chair to shut out disagreeable

sights, and the men (either because they were in spirits that their labours were so nearly ended, or because they were going down hill) set off at such a round and merry pace that it was all Miss Pole and I could do to keep up with them. She had breath for nothing beyond an imploring "Don't leave me!" uttered as she clutched my arm so tightly that I could not have quitted her, ghost or no ghost. What a relief it was when the men, weary of their burden and their quick trot, stopped just where Headingley Causeway branches off from Darkness Lane! Miss Pole unloosed me and caught at one of the men—

"Could not you—could not you take Miss Matty round by Headingley Causeway?—the pavement in Darkness Lane jolts so, and she is not very strong."

A smothered voice was heard from the inside of the chair—

"Oh! pray go on! What is the matter? What is the matter? I will give you sixpence more to go on very fast; pray don't stop here."

"And I'll give you a shilling," said Miss Pole, with tremulous dignity, "if you'll go by Headingley Causeway."

The two men grunted acquiescence and took up the chair, and went along the causeway, which certainly answered Miss Pole's kind purpose of saving Miss Matty's bones; for it was covered with soft, thick mud, and even a fall there would have been easy till the getting-up came, when there might have been some difficulty in extrication.

CHAPTER XI

SAMUEL BROWN

The next morning I met Lady Glenmire and Miss Pole setting out on a long walk to find some old woman who was famous in the neighbourhood for her skill in knitting woollen

stockings. Miss Pole said to me, with a smile half-kindly and half-contemptuous upon her countenance, "I have been just telling Lady Glenmire of our poor friend Mrs. Forrester, and her terror of ghosts. It comes from living so much alone, and listening to the bug-a-boo stories of that Jenny of hers." She was so calm and so much above superstitious fears herself that I was almost ashamed to say how glad I had been of her Headingley Causeway proposition the night before, and turned off the conversation to something else.

In the afternoon Miss Pole called on Miss Matty to tell her of the adventure—the real adventure they had met with on their morning's walk. They had been perplexed about the exact path which they were to take across the fields in order to find the knitting old woman, and had stopped to inquire at a little wayside public-house, standing on the high road to London, about three miles from Cranford. The good woman had asked them to sit down and rest themselves while she fetched her husband, who could direct them better than she could; and, while they were sitting in the sanded parlour, a little girl came in. They thought that she belonged to the landlady, and began some trifling conversation with her; but, on Mrs. Roberts's return, she told them that the little thing was the only child of a couple who were staying in the house. And then she began a long story, out of which Lady Glenmire and Miss Pole could only gather one or two decided facts, which were that, about six weeks ago, a light spring-cart had broken down just before their door, in which there were two men, one woman, and this child. One of the men was seriously hurt—no bones broken, only "shaken," the landlady called it; but he had probably sustained some severe internal injury, for he had languished in their house ever since, attended by his wife, the mother of this little girl. Miss Pole had asked what he was, what he looked like. And Mrs. Roberts had made answer that he was not like a gentleman, nor yet like a common person; if it had not been that he and his wife were such decent, quiet people, she could almost have thought he

was a mountebank, or something of that kind, for they had a great box in the cart, full of she did not know what. She had helped to unpack it, and take out their linen and clothes, when the other man—his twin-brother, she believed he was—had gone off with the horse and cart.

Miss Pole had begun to have her suspicions at this point, and expressed her idea that it was rather strange that the box and cart and horse and all should have disappeared; but good Mrs. Roberts seemed to have become quite indignant at Miss Pole's implied suggestion; in fact, Miss Pole said, she was as angry as if Miss Pole had told her that she herself was a swindler. As the best way of convincing the ladies, she bethought her of begging them to see the wife; and, as Miss Pole said, there was no doubting the honest, worn, bronzed face of the woman, who, at the first tender word from Lady Glenmire, burst into tears, which she was too weak to check until some word from the landlady made her swallow down her sobs, in order that she might testify to the Christian kindness shown by Mr. and Mrs. Roberts. Miss Pole came round with a swing to as vehement a belief in the sorrowful tale as she had been sceptical before; and, as a proof of this, her energy in the poor sufferer's behalf was nothing daunted when she found out that he, and no other, was our Signor Brunoni, to whom all Cranford had been attributing all manner of evil this six weeks past! Yes! his wife said his proper name was Samuel Brown—"Sam," she called him—but to the last we preferred calling him "the Signor"; it sounded so much better.

The end of their conversation with the Signora Brunoni was that it was agreed that he should be placed under medical advice; and for any expense incurred in procuring this Lady Glenmire promised to hold herself responsible, and had accordingly gone to Mr. Hoggins to beg him to ride over to the "Rising Sun" that very afternoon, and examine into the signor's real state; and, as Miss Pole said, if it was desirable to remove him to Cranford to be more immediately under Mr. Hoggins's eye, she would undertake to see for lodgings

and arrange about the rent. Mrs. Roberts had been as kind as could be all throughout, but it was evident that their long residence there had been a slight inconvenience.

Before Miss Pole left us, Miss Matty and I were as full of the morning's adventure as she was. We talked about it all the evening, turning it in every possible light, and we went to bed anxious for the morning, when we should surely hear from some one what Mr. Hoggins thought and recommended; for, as Miss Matty observed, though Mr. Hoggins did say "Jack's up," "a fig for his heels," and called Preference "Pref," she believed he was a very worthy man and a very clever surgeon. Indeed, we were rather proud of our doctor at Cranford, as a doctor. We often wished, when we heard of Queen Adelaide or the Duke of Wellington being ill, that they would send for Mr. Hoggins; but, on consideration, we were rather glad they did not, for, if we were ailing, what should we do if Mr. Hoggins had been appointed physician-in-ordinary to the Royal Family? As a surgeon we were proud of him; but as a man—or rather, I should say, as a gentleman—we could only shake our heads over his name and himself, and wished that he had read Lord Chesterfield's Letters in the days when his manners were susceptible of improvement. Nevertheless, we all regarded his dictum in the signor's case as infallible, and when he said that with care and attention he might rally, we had no more fear for him.

But, although we had no more fear, everybody did as much as if there was great cause for anxiety—as indeed there was until Mr. Hoggins took charge of him. Miss Pole looked out clean and comfortable, if homely, lodgings; Miss Matty sent the sedan-chair for him, and Martha and I aired it well before it left Cranford by holding a warming-pan full of red-hot coals in it, and then shutting it up close, smoke and all, until the time when he should get into it at the "Rising Sun." Lady Glenmire undertook the medical department under Mr. Hoggins's directions, and rummaged up all Mrs. Jamieson's medicine glasses, and spoons, and

bed-tables, in a free-and-easy way, that made Miss Matty feel a little anxious as to what that lady and Mr. Mulliner might say, if they knew. Mrs. Forrester made some of the bread-jelly, for which she was so famous, to have ready as a refreshment in the lodgings when he should arrive. A present of this bread-jelly was the highest mark of favour dear Mrs. Forrester could confer. Miss Pole had once asked her for the receipt, but she had met with a very decided rebuff; that lady told her that she could not part with it to any one during her life, and that after her death it was bequeathed, as her executors would find, to Miss Matty. What Miss Matty, or, as Mrs. Forrester called her (remembering the clause in her will and the dignity of the occasion), Miss Matilda Jenkyns—might choose to do with the receipt when it came into her possession—whether to make it public, or to hand it down as an heirloom—she did not know, nor would she dictate. And a mould of this admirable, digestible, unique bread-jelly was sent by Mrs. Forrester to our poor sick conjuror. Who says that the aristocracy are proud? Here was a lady by birth a Tyrrell, and descended from the great Sir Walter that shot King Rufus, and in whose veins ran the blood of him who murdered the little princes in the Tower, going every day to see what dainty dishes she could prepare for Samuel Brown, a mountebank! But, indeed, it was wonderful to see what kind feelings were called out by this poor man's coming amongst us. And also wonderful to see how the great Cranford panic, which had been occasioned by his first coming in his Turkish dress, melted away into thin air on his second coming—pale and feeble, and with his heavy, filmy eyes, that only brightened a very little when they fell upon the countenance of his faithful wife, or their pale and sorrowful little girl.

Somehow we all forgot to be afraid. I dare say it was that finding out that he, who had first excited our love of the marvellous by his unprecedented arts, had not sufficient every-day gifts to manage a shying horse, made us feel as if we were ourselves again. Miss Pole came with her little

basket at all hours of the evening, as if her lonely house and the unfrequented road to it had never been infested by that "murderous gang;" Mrs. Forrester said she thought that neither Jenny nor she need mind the headless lady who wept and wailed in Darkness Lane, for surely the power was never given to such beings to harm those who went about to try to do what little good was in their power, to which Jenny tremblingly assented; but the mistress's theory had little effect on the maid's practice until she had sewn two pieces of red flannel in the shape of a cross on her inner garment.

I found Miss Matty covering her penny ball—the ball that she used to roll under her bed—with gay-coloured worsted in rainbow stripes.

"My dear," said she, "my heart is sad for that little care-worn child. Although her father is a conjuror, she looks as if she had never had a good game of play in her life. I used to make very pretty balls in this way when I was a girl, and I thought I would try if I could not make this one smart and take it to Phœbe this afternoon. I think 'the gang' must have left the neighbourhood, for one does not hear any more of their violence and robbery now."

We were all of us far too full of the signor's precarious state to talk either about robbers or ghosts. Indeed, Lady Glenmire said she never had heard of any actual robberies, except that two little boys had stolen some apples from Farmer Benson's orchard, and that some eggs had been missed on a market-day off Widow Hayward's stall. But that was expecting too much of us; we could not acknowledge that we had only had this small foundation for all our panic. Miss Pole drew herself up at this remark of Lady Glenmire's, and said "that she wished she could agree with her as to the very small reason we had had for alarm; but, with the recollection of a man disguised as a woman who had endeavoured to force himself into her house while his confederates waited outside; with the knowledge gained from Lady Glenmire herself, of the footprints seen on Mrs.

Jamieson's flower borders; with the fact before her of the audacious robbery committed on Mr. Hoggins at his own door"—— But here Lady Glenmire broke in with a very strong expression of doubt as to whether this last story was not an entire fabrication founded upon the theft of a cat; she grew so red while she was saying all this that I was not surprised at Miss Pole's manner of bridling up, and I am certain, if Lady Glenmire had not been "her ladyship," we should have had a more emphatic contradiction than the "Well, to be sure!" and similar fragmentary ejaculations, which were all that she ventured upon in my lady's presence. But when she was gone Miss Pole began a long congratulation to Miss Matty that so far they had escaped marriage, which she noticed always made people credulous to the last degree; indeed, she thought it argued great natural credulity in a woman if she could not keep herself from being married; and in what Lady Glenmire had said about Mr. Hoggins's robbery we had a specimen of what people came to if they gave way to such a weakness; evidently Lady Glenmire would swallow anything if she could believe the poor vamped-up story about a neck of mutton and a pussy with which he had tried to impose on Miss Pole, only she had always been on her guard against believing too much of what men said.

We were thankful, as Miss Pole desired us to be, that we had never been married; but I think, of the two, we were even more thankful that the robbers had left Cranford; at least I judge so from a speech of Miss Matty's that evening, as we sat over the fire, in which she evidently looked upon a husband as a great protector against thieves, burglars, and ghosts; and said that she did not think that she should dare to be always warning young people against matrimony, as Miss Pole did continually; to be sure, marriage was a risk, as she saw, now she had had some experience; but she remembered the time when she had looked forward to being married as much as any one.

"Not to any particular person, my dear," said she,

hastily checking herself up, as if she were afraid of having admitted too much; "only the old story, you know, of ladies always saying, '*When* I marry,' and gentlemen, '*If* I marry,'" It was a joke spoken in rather a sad tone, and I doubt if either of us smiled; but I could not see Miss Matty's face by the flickering fire-light. In a little while she continued—

"But, after all, I have not told you the truth. It is so long ago, and no one ever knew how much I thought of it at the time, unless, indeed, my dear mother guessed; but I may say that there was a time when I did not think I should have been only Miss Matty Jenkyns all my life; for even if I did meet with any one who wished to marry me now (and, as Miss Pole says, one is never too safe), I could not take him—I hope he would not take it too much to heart, but I could *not* take him—or any one but the person I once thought I should be married to; and he is dead and gone, and he never knew how it all came about that I said 'No,' when I had thought many and many a time—Well, it's no matter what I thought. God ordains it all, and I am very happy, my dear. No one has such kind friends as I," continued she, taking my hand and holding it in hers.

If I had never known of Mr. Holbrook, I could have said something in this pause, but as I had, I could not think of anything that would come in naturally, and so we both kept silence for a little time.

"My father once made us," she began, "keep a diary, in two columns; on one side we were to put down in the morning what we thought would be the course and events of the coming day, and at night we were to put down on the other side what really had happened. It would be to some people rather a sad way of telling their lives" (a tear dropped upon my hand at these words)—"I don't mean that mine has been sad, only so very different to what I expected. I remember, one winter's evening, sitting over our bedroom fire with Deborah—I remember it as if it were yesterday—and we were planning our future lives, both of us were planning, though only she talked about it. She said

she should like to marry an archdeacon, and write his charges; and you know, my dear, she never was married, and, for aught I know, she never spoke to an unmarried archdeacon in her life. I never was ambitious, nor could I have written charges, but I thought I could manage a house (my mother used to call me her right hand), and I was always so fond of little children—the shyest babies would stretch out their little arms to come to me; when I was a girl, I was half my leisure time nursing in the neighbouring cottages; but I don't know how it was, when I grew sad and grave—which I did a year or two after this time—the little things drew back from me, and I am afraid I lost the knack, though I am just as fond of children as ever, and have a strange yearning at my heart whenever I see a mother with her baby in her arms. Nay, my dear" (and by a sudden blaze which sprang up from a fall of the unstirred coals, I saw that her eyes were full of tears—gazing intently on some vision of what might have been), "do you know I dream sometimes that I have a little child—always the same—a little girl of about two years old; she never grows older, though I have dreamt about her for many years. I don't think I ever dream of any words or sound she makes; she is very noiseless and still, but she comes to me when she is very sorry or very glad, and I have wakened with the clasp of her dear little arms round my neck. Only last night—perhaps because I had gone to sleep thinking of this ball for Phœbe—my little darling came in my dream, and put up her mouth to be kissed, just as I have seen real babies do to real mothers before going to bed. But all this is nonsense, dear! only don't be frightened by Miss Pole from being married. I can fancy it may be a very happy state, and a little credulity helps one on through life very smoothly—better than always doubting and doubting and seeing difficulties and disagreeables in everything."

If I had been inclined to be daunted from matrimony, it would not have been Miss Pole to do it; it would have been the lot of poor Signor Brunoni and his wife. And yet again,

it was an encouragement to see how, through all their cares and sorrows, they thought of each other and not of themselves; and how keen were their joys, if they only passed through each other, or through the little Phœbe.

The signora told me, one day, a good deal about their lives up to this period. It began by my asking her whether Miss Pole's story of the twin-brothers was true; it sounded so wonderful a likeness, that I should have had my doubts, if Miss Pole had not been unmarried. But the signora, or (as we found out she preferred to be called) Mrs. Brown, said it was quite true; that her brother-in-law was by many taken for her husband, which was of great assistance to them in their profession; "though," she continued, "how people can mistake Thomas for the real Signor Brunoni, I can't conceive; but he says they do; so I suppose I must believe him. Not but what he is a very good man; I am sure I don't know how we should have paid our bill at the 'Rising Sun' but for the money he sends; but people must know very little about art if they can take him for my husband. Why, miss, in the ball trick, where my husband spreads his fingers wide, and throws out his little finger with quite an air and a grace, Thomas just clumps up his hand like a fist, and might have ever so many balls hidden in it. Besides, he has never been in India, and knows nothing of the proper sit of a turban."

"Have you been in India?" said I, rather astonished.

"Oh, yes! many a year, ma'am. Sam was a sergeant in the 31st; and when the regiment was ordered to India, I drew a lot to go, and I was more thankful than I can tell; for it seemed as if it would only be a slow death to me to part from my husband. But, indeed, ma'am, if I had known all, I don't know whether I would not rather have died there and then than gone through what I have done since. To be sure, I've been able to comfort Sam, and to be with him; but, ma'am, I've lost six children," she said, looking up at me with those strange eyes that I've never noticed but in mothers of dead children—with a kind of wild look in them,

as if seeking for what they never more might find. "Yes! Six children died off, like little buds nipped untimely, in that cruel India. I thought, as each died, I never could—I never would—love a child again; and when the next came, it had not only its own love, but the deeper love that came from the thoughts of its little dead brothers and sisters. And when Phœbe was coming, I said to my husband, 'Sam, when the child is born, and I am strong, I shall leave you; it will cut my heart cruel; but if this baby dies too, I shall go mad; the madness is in me now; but if you let me go down to Calcutta, carrying my baby step by step, it will, maybe, work itself off; and I will save, and I will hoard, and I will beg—and I will die, to get a passage home to England, where our baby may live?' God bless him! he said I might go; and he saved up his pay, and I saved every pice I could get for washing or any way; and when Phœbe came, and I grew strong again, I set off. It was very lonely; through the thick forests, dark again with their heavy trees—along by the river's side (but I had been brought up near the Avon in Warwickshire, so that flowing noise sounded like home)—from station to station, from Indian village to village, I went along, carrying my child. I had seen one of the officers' ladies with a little picture, ma'am—done by a Catholic foreigner, ma'am—of the Virgin and the little Saviour, ma'am. She had him on her arm, and her form was softly curled round him, and their cheeks touched. Well, when I went to bid good-bye to this lady, for whom I had washed, she cried sadly; for she, too, had lost her children, but she had not another to save, like me; and I was bold enough to ask her would she give me that print. And she cried the more, and said *her* children were with that little blessed Jesus; and gave it me, and told me she had heard it had been painted on the bottom of a cask, which made it have that round shape. And when my body was very weary, and my heart was sick (for there were times when I misdoubted if I could ever reach my home, and there were times when I thought of my husband, and one time when I thought my baby was

dying), I took out that picture and looked at it, till I could have thought the mother spoke to me, and comforted me. And the natives were very kind. We could not understand one another; but they saw my baby on my breast, and they came out to me, and brought me rice and milk, and sometimes flowers—I have got some of the flowers dried. Then, the next morning, I was so tired; and they wanted me to stay with them—I could tell that—and tried to frighten me from going into the deep woods, which, indeed, looked very strange and dark; but it seemed to me as if Death was following me to take my baby away from me; and as if I must go on, and on—and I thought how God had cared for mothers ever since the world was made, and would care for me; so I bade them good-bye, and set off afresh. And once when my baby was ill, and both she and I needed rest, He led me to a place where I found a kind Englishman lived, right in the midst of the natives."

"And you reached Calcutta safely at last?"

"Yes, safely! Oh! when I knew I had only two days' journey more before me, I could not help it, ma'am—it might be idolatry, I cannot tell—but I was near one of the native temples, and I went in it with my baby to thank God for His great mercy; for it seemed to me that where others had prayed before to their God, in their joy or in their agony, was of itself a sacred place. And I got as servant to an invalid lady, who grew quite fond of my baby aboard-ship; and, in two years' time, Sam earned his discharge, and came home to me, and to our child. Then he had to fix on a trade; but he knew of none; and once, once upon a time, he had learnt some tricks from an Indian juggler; so he set up conjuring, and it answered so well that he took Thomas to help him—as his man, you know, not as another conjuror, though Thomas has set it up now on his own hook. But it has been a great help to us that likeness between the twins, and made a good many tricks go off well that they made up together. And Thomas is a good brother, only he has not the fine carriage of my husband, so that I can't

think how he can be taken for Signor Brunoni himself, as he says he is."

"Poor little Phœbe!" said I, my thoughts going back to the baby she carried all those hundred miles.

"Ah! you may say so! I never thought I should have reared her, though, when she fell ill at Chunderabaddad; but that good, kind Aga Jenkyns took us in, which I believe was the very saving of her."

"Jenkyns!" said I.

"Yes, Jenkyns. I shall think all people of that name are kind; for here is that nice old lady who comes every day to take Phœbe a walk!"

But an idea had flashed through my head: could the Aga Jenkyns be the lost Peter? True, he was reported by many to be dead. But, equally true, some had said that he had arrived at the dignity of Great Lama of Thibet. Miss Matty thought he was alive. I would make further inquiry.

CHAPTER XII

ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED

Was the "poor Peter" of Cranford the Aga Jenkyns of Chunderabaddad, or was he not? As somebody says, that was the question.

In my own home, whenever people had nothing else to do, they blamed me for want of discretion. Indiscretion was my bugbear fault. Everybody has a bugbear fault; a sort of standing characteristic—a *pièce de résistance* for their friends to cut at; and in general they cut and come again. I was tired of being called indiscreet and incautious; and I determined for once to prove myself a model of prudence and wisdom. I would not even hint my suspicions respecting the Aga. I would collect evidence and carry it home to lay

before my father, as the family friend of the two Miss Jenkynses.

In my search after facts, I was often reminded of a description my father had once given of a ladies' committee that he had had to preside over. He said he could not help thinking of a passage in Dickens, which spoke of a chorus in which every man took the tune he knew best, and sang it to his own satisfaction. So, at this charitable committee, every lady took the subject uppermost in her mind, and talked about it to her own great contentment, but not much to the advancement of the subject they had met to discuss. But even that committee could have been nothing to the Cranford ladies when I attempted to gain some clear and definite information as to poor Peter's height, appearance, and when and where he was seen and heard of last. For instance, I remember asking Miss Pole (and I thought the question was very opportune, for I put it when I met her at a call at Mrs. Forrester's, and both the ladies had known Peter, and I imagined that they might refresh each other's memories)—I asked Miss Pole what was the very last thing they had ever heard about him; and then she named the absurd report to which I have alluded, about his having been elected Great Lama of Thibet; and this was a signal for each lady to go off on her separate idea. Mrs. Forrester's start was made on the veiled prophet in Lalla Rookh—whether I thought he was meant for the Great Lama, though Peter was not so ugly, indeed rather handsome, if he had not been freckled. I was thankful to see her double upon Peter; but, in a moment, the delusive lady was off upon Rowland's Kalydor, and the merits of cosmetics and hair oils in general, and holding forth so fluently that I turned to listen to Miss Pole, who (through the llamas, the beasts of burden) had got to Peruvian bonds, and the share market, and her poor opinion of joint-stock banks in general, and of that one in particular in which Miss Matty's money was invested. In vain I put in "When was it—in what year was it that you heard that Mr. Peter was the Great Lama?" They only

joined issue to dispute whether llamas were carnivorous animals or not; in which dispute they were not quite on fair grounds, as Mrs. Forrester (after they had grown warm and cool again) acknowledged that she always confused carnivorous and graminivorous together, just as she did horizontal and perpendicular; but then she apologised for it very prettily, by saying that in her day the only use people made of four-syllabled words was to teach how they should be spelt.

The only fact I gained from this conversation was that certainly Peter had last been heard of in India, "or that neighbourhood;" and that this scanty intelligence of his whereabouts had reached Cranford in the year when Miss Pole had bought her Indian muslin gown, long since worn out (we washed it and mended it, and traced its decline and fall into a window-blind before we could go on); and in a year when Wombwell came to Cranford, because Miss Matty had wanted to see an elephant in order that she might the better imagine Peter riding on one; and had seen a boa-constrictor too, which was more than she wished to imagine in her fancy-pictures of Peter's locality; and in a year when Miss Jenkyns had learnt some piece of poetry off by heart, and used to say, at all the Cranford parties, how Peter was "surveying mankind from China to Peru," which everybody had thought very grand, and rather appropriate, because India was between China and Peru, if you took care to turn the globe to the left instead of the right.

I suppose all these inquiries of mine, and the consequent curiosity excited in the minds of my friends, made us blind and deaf to what was going on around us. It seemed to me as if the sun rose and shone, and as if the rain rained on Cranford, just as usual, and I did not notice any sign of the times that could be considered as a prognostic of any uncommon event; and, to the best of my belief, not only Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester, but even Miss Pole herself, whom we looked upon as a kind of prophetess, from the knack she had of foreseeing things before they came to pass—although

she did not like to disturb her friends by telling them her foreknowledge—even Miss Pole herself was breathless with astonishment when she came to tell us of the astounding piece of news. But I must recover myself; the contemplation of it, even at this distance of time, has taken away my breath and my grammar, and, unless I subdue my emotion, my spelling will go too.

We were sitting—Miss Matty and I—much as usual, she in the blue chintz easy-chair, with her back to the light, and her knitting in her hand, I reading aloud the *St. James's Chronicle*. A few minutes more, and we should have gone to make the little alterations in dress usual before calling-time (twelve o'clock) in Cranford. I remember the scene and the date well. We had been talking of the signor's rapid recovery since the warmer weather had set in, and praising Mr. Hoggins's skill, and lamenting his want of refinement and manner (it seems a curious coincidence that this should have been our subject, but so it was), when a knock was heard—a caller's knock—three distinct taps—and we were flying (that is to say, Miss Matty could not walk very fast, having had a touch of rheumatism) to our rooms, to change cap and collars, when Miss Pole arrested us by calling out, as she came up the stairs, "Don't go—I can't wait—it is not twelve, I know—but never mind your dress—I must speak to you." We did our best to look as if it was not we who had made the hurried movement, the sound of which she had heard; for, of course, we did not like to have it supposed that we had any old clothes that it was convenient to wear out in the "sanctuary of home," as Miss Jenkyns once prettily called the back parlour, where she was tying up preserves. So we threw our gentility with double force into our manners, and very genteel we were for two minutes while Miss Pole recovered breath, and excited our curiosity strongly by lifting up her hands in amazement, and bringing them down in silence, as if what she had to say was too big for words, and could only be expressed by pantomime.

"What do you think, Miss Matty? What *do* you think?

Lady Glenmire is to marry—is to be married, I mean—Lady Glenmire—Mr. Hoggins—Mr. Hoggins is going to marry Lady Glenmire!"

"Marry!" said we. "Marry! Madness!"

"Marry!" said Miss Pole, with the decision that belonged to her character. "*I* said, 'Marry!' as you do; and I also said, 'What a fool my lady is going to make of herself!' I could have said 'Madness!' but I controlled myself, for it was in a public shop that I heard of it. Where feminine delicacy is gone to, I don't know! You and I, Miss Matty, would have been ashamed to have known that our marriage was spoken of in a grocer's shop, in the hearing of shopmen!"

"But," said Miss Matty, sighing as one recovering from a blow, "perhaps it is not true. Perhaps we are doing her injustice."

"No," said Miss Pole. "I have taken care to ascertain that. I went straight to Mrs. Fitz-Adam, to borrow a cookery-book which I knew she had; and I introduced my congratulations *à propos* of the difficulty gentlemen must have in housekeeping; and Mrs. Fitz-Adam bridled up, and said that she believed it was true, though how and where I could have heard it she did not know. She said her brother and Lady Glenmire had come to an understanding at last. 'Understanding!' such a coarse word! But my lady will have to come down to many a want of refinement. I have reason to believe Mr. Hoggins sups on bread-and-cheese and beer every night."

"Marry!" said Miss Matty once again. "Well! I never thought of it. Two people that we know going to be married. It's coming very near!"

"So near that my heart stopped beating, when I heard of it, while you might have counted twelve," said Miss Pole.

"One does not know whose turn may come next. Here, in Cranford, poor Lady Glenmire might have thought herself safe," said Miss Matty, with a gentle pity in her tones.

"Bah!" said Miss Pole, with a toss of her head. "Don't

you remember poor dear Captain Brown's song 'Tibbie Fowler,' and the line—

> 'Set her on the Tintock Tap,
> The wind will blaw a man till her.'"

"That was because 'Tibbie Fowler' was rich, I think."

"Well! there is a kind of attraction about Lady Glenmire that I, for one, should be ashamed to have."

I put in my wonder. "But how can she have fancied Mr. Hoggins? I am not surprised that Mr. Hoggins has liked her."

"Oh! I don't know. Mr. Hoggins is rich, and very pleasant-looking," said Miss Matty, "and very good-tempered and kind-hearted."

"She has married for an establishment, that's it. I suppose she takes the surgery with it," said Miss Pole, with a little dry laugh at her own joke. But, like many people who think they have made a severe and sarcastic speech, which yet is clever of its kind, she began to relax in her grimness from the moment when she made this allusion to the surgery; and we turned to speculate on the way in which Mrs. Jamieson would receive the news. The person whom she had left in charge of her house to keep off followers from her maids to set up a follower of her own! And that follower a man whom Mrs. Jamieson had tabooed as vulgar, and inadmissible to Cranford society, not merely on account of his name, but because of his voice, his complexion, his boots, smelling of the stable, and himself, smelling of drugs. Had he ever been to see Lady Glenmire at Mrs. Jamieson's? Chloride of lime would not purify the house in its owner's estimation if he had. Or had their interviews been confined to the occasional meetings in the chamber of the poor sick conjuror, to whom, with all our sense of the *mésalliance*, we could not help allowing that they had both been exceedingly kind? And now it turned out that a servant of Mrs. Jamieson's had been ill, and Mr. Hoggins had been attending her for some weeks. So the wolf had got into the fold, and now he was carrying off the shepherdess. What would Mrs.

Jamieson say? We looked into the darkness of futurity as a child gazes after a rocket up in the cloudy sky, full of wondering expectation of the rattle, the discharge, and the brilliant shower of sparks and light. Then we brought ourselves down to earth and the present time by questioning each other (being all equally ignorant, and all equally without the slightest data to build any conclusions upon) as to when IT would take place? Where? How much a year Mr. Hoggins had? Whether she would drop her title? And how Martha and the other correct servants in Cranford would ever be brought to announce a married couple as Lady Glenmire and Mr. Hoggins? But would they be visited? Would Mrs. Jamieson let us? Or must we choose between the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson and the degraded Lady Glenmire? We all liked Lady Glenmire the best. She was bright, and kind, and sociable, and agreeable; and Mrs. Jamieson was dull, and inert, and pompous, and tiresome. But we had acknowledged the sway of the latter so long, that it seemed like a kind of disloyalty now even to meditate disobedience to the prohibition we anticipated.

Mrs. Forrester surprised us in our darned caps and patched collars; and we forgot all about them in our eagerness to see how she would bear the information, which we honourably left to Miss Pole to impart, although, if we had been inclined to take unfair advantage, we might have rushed in ourselves, for she had a most out-of-place fit of coughing for five minutes after Mrs. Forrester entered the room. I shall never forget the imploring expression of her eyes, as she looked at us over her pocket-handkerchief. They said, as plain as words could speak, "Don't let Nature deprive me of the treasure which is mine, although for a time I can make no use of it." And we did not.

Mrs. Forrester's surprise was equal to ours; and her sense of injury rather greater, because she had to feel for her Order, and saw more fully than we could do how such conduct brought stains on the aristocracy.

When she and Miss Pole left us we endeavoured to

subside into calmness; but Miss Matty was really upset by the intelligence she had heard. She reckoned it up, and it was more than fifteen years since she had heard of any of her acquaintance going to be married, with the one exception of Miss Jessie Brown; and, as she said, it gave her quite a shock, and made her feel as if she could not think what would happen next.

I don't know whether it is a fancy of mine, or a real fact, but I have noticed that, just after the announcement of an engagement in any set, the unmarried ladies in that set flutter out in an unusual gaiety and newness of dress, as much as to say, in a tacit and unconscious manner, "We also are spinsters." Miss Matty and Miss Pole talked and thought more about bonnets, gowns, caps, and shawls, during the fortnight that succeeded this call, than I had known them do for years before. But it might be the spring weather, for it was a warm and pleasant March; and merinoes and beavers, and woollen materials of all sorts were but ungracious receptacles of the bright sun's glancing rays. It had not been Lady Glenmire's dress that had won Mr. Hoggins's heart, for she went about on her errands of kindness more shabby than ever. Although in the hurried glimpses I caught of her at church or elsewhere she appeared rather to shun meeting any of her friends, her face seemed to have almost something of the flush of youth in it; her lips looked redder and more trembling full than in their old compressed state, and her eyes dwelt on all things with a lingering light, as if she was learning to love Cranford and its belongings. Mr. Hoggins looked broad and radiant, and creaked up the middle aisle at church in a bran-new pair of top-boots—an audible, as well as visible, sign of his purposed change of state; for the tradition went, that the boots he had worn till now were the identical pair in which he first set out on his rounds in Cranford twenty-five years ago; only they had been new-pieced, high and low, top and bottom, heel and sole, black leather and brown leather, more times than any one could tell.

None of the ladies in Cranford chose to sanction the marriage by congratulating either of the parties. We wished to ignore the whole affair until our liege lady, Mrs. Jamieson, returned. Till she came back to give us our cue, we felt that it would be better to consider the engagement in the same light as the Queen of Spain's legs—facts which certainly existed, but the less said about the better. This restraint upon our tongues—for you see, if we did not speak about it to any of the parties concerned, how could we get answers to the questions that we longed to ask?—was beginning to be irksome, and our idea of the dignity of silence was paling before our curiosity, when another direction was given to our thoughts, by an announcement on the part of the principal shopkeeper of Cranford, who ranged the trades from grocer and cheesemonger to man-milliner, as occasion required, that the spring fashions were arrived, and would be exhibited on the following Tuesday at his rooms in High Street. Now Miss Matty had been only waiting for this before buying herself a new silk gown. I had offered, it is true, to send to Drumble for patterns, but she had rejected my proposal, gently implying that she had not forgotten her disappointment about the sea-green turban. I was thankful that I was on the spot now, to counteract the dazzling fascination of any yellow or scarlet silk.

I must say a word or two here about myself. I have spoken of my father's old friendship for the Jenkyns family; indeed, I am not sure if there was not some distant relationship. He had willingly allowed me to remain all the winter at Cranford, in consideration of a letter which Miss Matty had written to him about the time of the panic, in which I suspect she had exaggerated my powers and my bravery as a defender of the house. But now that the days were longer and more cheerful, he was beginning to urge the necessity of my return; and I only delayed in a sort of odd forlorn hope that, if I could obtain any clear information, I might make the account given by the signora of the Aga Jenkyns tally with

that of "poor Peter," his appearance and disappearance, which I had winnowed out of the conversation of Miss Pole and Mrs. Forrester.

CHAPTER XIII

STOPPED PAYMENT

The very Tuesday morning on which Mr. Johnson was going to show the fashions, the post-woman brought two letters to the house. I say the post-woman, but I should say the postman's wife. He was a lame shoemaker, a very clean, honest man, much respected in the town; but he never brought the letters round except on unusual occasions, such as Christmas Day or Good Friday; and on those days the letters, which should have been delivered at eight in the morning, did not make their appearance until two or three in the afternoon, for every one liked poor Thomas, and gave him a welcome on these festive occasions. He used to say, "He was welly stawed wi' eating, for there were three or four houses where nowt would serve 'em but he must share in their breakfast;" and, by the time he had done his last breakfast, he came to some other friend who was beginning dinner; but come what might in the way of temptation, Tom was always sober, civil, and smiling; and, as Miss Jenkyns used to say, it was a lesson in patience, that she doubted not would call out that precious quality in some minds, where, but for Thomas, it might have lain dormant and undiscovered. Patience was certainly very dormant in Miss Jenkyns's mind. She was always expecting letters, and always drumming on the table till the post-woman had called or gone past. On Christmas Day and Good Friday she drummed from breakfast till church, from church-time till two o'clock—unless when the fire wanted stirring, when she invariably knocked down the fire-irons, and scolded Miss Matty for it. But

equally certain was the hearty welcome and the good dinner for Thomas; Miss Jenkyns standing over him like a bold dragoon, questioning him as to his children—what they were doing—what school they went to; upbraiding him if another was likely to make its appearance, but sending even the little babies the shilling and the mince-pie which was her gift to all the children, with half-a-crown in addition for both father and mother. The post was not of half so much consequence to dear Miss Matty; but not for the world would she have diminished Thomas's welcome and his dole, though I could see that she felt rather shy over the ceremony, which had been regarded by Miss Jenkyns as a glorious opportunity for giving advice and benefiting her fellow-creatures. Miss Matty would steal the money all in a lump into his hand, as if she were ashamed of herself. Miss Jenkyns gave him each individual coin separate, with a "There! that's for yourself; that's for Jenny," &c. Miss Matty would even beckon Martha out of the kitchen while he ate his food; and once, to my knowledge, winked at its rapid disappearance into a blue cotton pocket-handkerchief. Miss Jenkyns almost scolded him if he did not leave a clean plate, however heaped it might have been, and gave an injunction with every mouthful.

I have wandered a long way from the two letters that awaited us on the breakfast-table that Tuesday morning. Mine was from my father. Miss Matty's was printed. My father's was just a man's letter; I mean it was very dull, and gave no information beyond that he was well, that they had had a good deal of rain, that trade was very stagnant, and there were many disagreeable rumours afloat. He then asked me if I knew whether Miss Matty still retained her shares in the Town and County Bank, as there were very unpleasant reports about it; though nothing more than he had always foreseen, and had prophesied to Miss Jenkyns years ago, when she would invest their little property in it—the only unwise step that clever woman had ever taken, to his knowledge (the only time she ever acted against his advice, I knew). However, if anything had gone wrong, of

course I was not to think of leaving Miss Matty while I could be of any use, &c.

"Who is your letter from, my dear? Mine is a very civil invitation, signed 'Edwin Wilson,' asking me to attend an important meeting of the shareholders of the Town and County Bank, to be held in Drumble, on Thursday the twenty-first. I am sure, it is very attentive of them to remember me."

I did not like to hear of this "important meeting," for, though I did not know much about business, I feared it confirmed what my father said; however, I thought, ill news always came fast enough, so I resolved to say nothing about my alarm, and merely told her that my father was well, and sent his kind regards to her. She kept turning over and admiring her letter. At last she spoke—

"I remember their sending one to Deborah just like this; but that I did not wonder at, for everybody knew she was so clear-headed. I am afraid I could not help them much; indeed, if they came to accounts, I should be quite in the way, for I never could do sums in my head. Deborah, I know, rather wished to go, and went so far as to order a new bonnet for the occasion: but when the time came she had a bad cold; so they sent her a very polite account of what they had done. Chosen a director, I think it was. Do you think they want me to help them to choose a director? I am sure I should choose your father at once."

"My father has no shares in the bank," said I.

"Oh, no! I remember. He objected very much to Deborah's buying any, I believe. But she was quite the woman of business, and always judged for herself; and here, you see, they have paid eight per cent. all these years."

It was a very uncomfortable subject to me, with my half-knowledge; so I thought I would change the conversation, and I asked at what time she thought we had better go and see the fashions. "Well, my dear," she said, "the thing is this: it is not etiquette to go till after twelve; but then, you see, all Cranford will be there, and one does not like to be too

curious about dress and trimmings and caps with all the world looking on. It is never genteel to be over-curious on these occasions. Deborah had the knack of always looking as if the latest fashion was nothing new to her; a manner she had caught from Lady Arley, who did see all the new modes in London, you know. So I thought we would just slip down this morning, soon after breakfast—for I do want half-a-pound of tea—and then we could go up and examine the things at our leisure, and see exactly how my new silk gown must be made; and then, after twelve, we could go with our minds disengaged, and free from thoughts of dress."

We began to talk of Miss Matty's new silk gown. I discovered that it would be really the first time in her life that she had had to choose anything of consequence for herself: for Miss Jenkyns had always been the more decided character, whatever her taste might have been; and it is astonishing how such people carry the world before them by the mere force of will. Miss Matty anticipated the sight of the glossy folds with as much delight as if the five sovereigns, set apart for the purchase, could buy all the silks in the shop; and (remembering my own loss of two hours in a toyshop before I could tell on what wonder to spend a silver threepence) I was very glad that we were going early, that dear Miss Matty might have leisure for the delights of perplexity.

If a happy sea-green could be met with, the gown was to be sea-green: if not, she inclined to maize, and I to silver grey; and we discussed the requisite number of breadths until we arrived at the shop-door. We were to buy the tea, select the silk, and then clamber up the iron corkscrew stairs that led into what was once a loft, though now a fashion show-room.

The young men at Mr. Johnson's had on their best looks, and their best cravats, and pivoted themselves over the counter with surprising activity. They wanted to show us upstairs at once; but on the principle of business first and pleasure afterwards, we stayed to purchase the tea. Here Miss Matty's absence of mind betrayed itself. If she was

made aware that she had been drinking green tea at any time, she always thought it her duty to lie awake half through the night afterward (I have known her take it in ignorance many a time without such effects), and consequently green tea was prohibited the house; yet to-day she herself asked for the obnoxious article, under the impression that she was talking about the silk. However, the mistake was soon rectified; and then the silks were unrolled in good truth. By this time the shop was pretty well filled, for it was Cranford market-day, and many of the farmers and country people from the neighbourhood round came in, sleeking down their hair, and glancing shyly about, from under their eyelids, as anxious to take back some notion of the unusual gaiety to the mistress or the lasses at home, and yet feeling that they were out of place among the smart shopmen and gay shawls and summer prints. One honest-looking man, however, made his way up to the counter at which we stood, and boldly asked to look at a shawl or two. The other country folk confined themselves to the grocery side; but our neighbour was evidently too full of some kind intention towards mistress, wife, or daughter, to be shy; and it soon became a question with me, whether he or Miss Matty would keep their shopman the longest time. He thought each shawl more beautiful than the last; and, as for Miss Matty, she smiled and sighed over each fresh bale that was brought out; one colour set off another, and the heap together would, as she said, make even the rainbow look poor.

"I am afraid," said she, hesitating, "whichever I choose I shall wish I had taken another. Look at this lovely crimson! it would be so warm in winter. But spring is coming on, you know. I wish I could have a gown for every season," said she, dropping her voice—as we all did in Cranford whenever we talked of anything we wished for but could not afford. "However," she continued, in a louder and more cheerful tone, "it would give me a great deal of trouble to take care of them if I had them; so, I think, I'll only take one. But which must it be, my dear?"

And now she hovered over a lilac with yellow spots, while I pulled out a quiet sage-green that had faded into insignificance under the more brilliant colours, but which was nevertheless a good silk in its humble way. Our attention was called off to our neighbour. He had chosen a shawl of about thirty shillings' value; and his face looked broadly happy, under the anticipation, no doubt, of the pleasant surprise he should give to some Molly or Jenny at home; he had tugged a leathern purse out of his breeches-pocket, and had offered a five-pound note in payment for the shawl, and for some parcels which had been brought round to him from the grocery counter; and it was just at this point that he attracted our notice. The shopman was examining the note with a puzzled, doubtful air.

"Town and County Bank! I am not sure, sir, but I believe we have received a warning against notes issued by this bank only this morning. I will just step and ask Mr. Johnson, sir; but I'm afraid I must trouble you for payment in cash, or in a note of a different bank."

I never saw a man's countenance fall so suddenly into dismay and bewilderment. It was almost piteous to see the rapid change.

"Dang it!" said he, striking his fist down on the table, as if to try which was the harder, "the chap talks as if notes and gold were to be had for the picking up."

Miss Matty had forgotten her silk gown in her interest for the man. I don't think she had caught the name of the bank, and in my nervous cowardice I was anxious that she should not; and so I began admiring the yellow-spotted lilac gown that I had been utterly condemning only a minute before. But it was of no use.

"What bank was it? I mean, what bank did your note belong to?"

"Town and County Bank."

"Let me see it," said she quietly to the shopman, gently taking it out of his hand, as he brought it back to return it to the farmer.

Mr. Johnson was very sorry, but, from information he had received, the notes issued by that bank were little better than waste paper.

"I don't understand it," said Miss Matty to me in a low voice. "That is our bank, is it not?—the Town and County Bank?"

"Yes," said I. "This lilac silk will just match the ribbons in your new cap, I believe," I continued, holding up the folds so as to catch the light, and wishing that the man would make haste and be gone, and yet having a new wonder, that had only just sprung up, how far it was wise or right in me to allow Miss Matty to make this expensive purchase, if the affairs of the bank were really so bad as the refusal of the note implied.

But Miss Matty put on the soft dignified manner peculiar to her, rarely used, and yet which became her so well, and, laying her hand gently on mine, she said—

"Never mind the silks for a few minutes, dear. I don't understand you, sir," turning now to the shopman, who had been attending to the farmer. "Is this a forged note?"

"Oh, no, ma'am. It is a true note of its kind; but you see, ma'am, it is a joint-stock bank, and there are reports out that it is likely to break. Mr. Johnson is only doing his duty, ma'am, as I am sure Mr. Dobson knows."

But Mr. Dobson could not respond to the appealing bow by any answering smile. He was turning the note absently over in his fingers, looking gloomily enough at the parcel containing the lately-chosen shawl.

"It's hard upon a poor man," said he, "as earns every farthing with the sweat of his brow. However, there's no help for it. You must take back your shawl, my man; Lizzie must do on with her cloak for a while. And yon figs for the little ones—I promised them to 'em—I'll take them; but the 'bacco, and the other things"——

"I will give you five sovereigns for your note, my good man," said Miss Matty. "I think there is some great mistake about it, for I am one of the shareholders, and I'm sure

they would have told me if things had not been going on right."

The shopman whispered a word or two across the table to Miss Matty. She looked at him with a dubious air.

"Perhaps so," said she. "But I don't pretend to understand business; I only know that if it is going to fail, and if honest people are to lose their money because they have taken our notes—I can't explain myself," said she, suddenly becoming aware that she had got into a long sentence with four people for audience; "only I would rather exchange my gold for the note, if you please," turning to the farmer, "and then you can take your wife the shawl. It is only going without my gown a few days longer," she continued, speaking to me. "Then, I have no doubt, everything will be cleared up."

"But if it is cleared up the wrong way?" said I.

"Why, then it will only have been common honesty in me, as a shareholder, to have given this good man the money. I am quite clear about it in my own mind; but, you know, I can never speak quite as comprehensibly as others can; only you must give me your note, Mr. Dobson, if you please, and go on with your purchases with these sovereigns."

The man looked at her with silent gratitude—too awkward to put his thanks into words; but he hung back for a minute or two, fumbling with his note.

"I'm loth to make another one lose instead of me, if it is a loss; but, you see, five pounds is a deal of money to a man with a family; and, as you say, ten to one in a day or two the note will be as good as gold again."

"No hope of that, my friend," said the shopman.

"The more reason why I should take it," said Miss Matty quietly. She pushed her sovereigns towards the man, who slowly laid his note down in exchange. "Thank you. I will wait a day or two before I purchase any of these silks; perhaps you will then have a greater choice. My dear, will you come upstairs?"

We inspected the fashions with as minute and curious an

interest as if the gown to be made after them had been bought. I could not see that the little event in the shop below had in the least damped Miss Matty's curiosity as to the make of sleeves or the sit of skirts. She once or twice exchanged congratulations with me on our private and leisurely view of the bonnets and shawls; but I was, all the time, not so sure that our examination was so utterly private, for I caught glimpses of a figure dodging behind the cloaks and mantles; and, by a dexterous move, I came face to face with Miss Pole, also in morning costume (the principal feature of which was her being without teeth, and wearing a veil to conceal the deficiency), come on the same errand as ourselves. But she quickly took her departure, because, as she said, she had a bad headache, and did not feel herself up to conversation.

As we came down through the shop, the civil Mr. Johnson was awaiting us; he had been informed of the exchange of the note for gold, and with much good feeling and real kindness, but with a little want of tact, he wished to condole with Miss Matty, and impress upon her the true state of the case. I could only hope that he had heard an exaggerated rumour, for he said that her shares were worse than nothing, and that the bank could not pay a shilling in the pound. I was glad that Miss Matty seemed still a little incredulous; but I could not tell how much of this was real or assumed, with that self-control which seemed habitual to ladies of Miss Matty's standing in Cranford, who would have thought their dignity compromised by the slightest expression of surprise, dismay, or any similar feeling to an inferior in station, or in a public shop. However, we walked home very silently. I am ashamed to say, I believe I was rather vexed and annoyed at Miss Matty's conduct in taking the note to herself so decidedly. I had so set my heart upon her having a new silk gown, which she wanted sadly; in general she was so undecided anybody might turn her round; in this case I had felt that it was no use attempting it, but I was not the less put out at the result.

Somehow, after twelve o'clock, we both acknowledged to a sated curiosity about the fashions, and to a certain fatigue of body (which was, in fact, depression of mind) that indisposed us to go out again. But still we never spoke of the note; till, all at once, something possessed me to ask Miss Matty if she would think it her duty to offer sovereigns for all the notes of the Town and County Bank she met with? I could have bitten my tongue out the minute I had said it. She looked up rather sadly, and as if I had thrown a new perplexity into her already distressed mind; and for a minute or two she did not speak. Then she said—my own dear Miss Matty—without a shade of reproach in her voice—

"My dear, I never feel as if my mind was what people call very strong; and it's often hard enough work for me to settle what I ought to do with the case right before me. I was very thankful to—I was very thankful, that I saw my duty this morning, with the poor man standing by me; but it's rather a strain upon me to keep thinking and thinking what I should do if such and such a thing happened; and, I believe, I had rather wait and see what really does come; and I don't doubt I shall be helped then if I don't fidget myself, and get too anxious beforehand. You know, love, I'm not like Deborah. If Deborah had lived, I've no doubt she would have seen after them, before they had got themselves into this state."

We had neither of us much appetite for dinner, though we tried to talk cheerfully about indifferent things. When we returned into the drawing-room, Miss Matty unlocked her desk and began to look over her account-books. I was so penitent for what I had said in the morning, that I did not choose to take upon myself the presumption to suppose that I could assist her; I rather left her alone, as, with puzzled brow, her eye followed her pen up and down the ruled page. By-and-by she shut the book, locked her desk, and came and drew a chair to mine, where I sat in moody sorrow over the fire. I stole my hand into hers; she clasped it, but did not speak a word. At last she said, with forced composure in

her voice, "If that bank goes wrong, I shall lose one hundred and forty-nine pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence a year; I shall only have thirteen pounds a year left." I squeezed her hand hard and tight. I did not know what to say. Presently (it was too dark to see her face) I felt her fingers work convulsively in my grasp; and I knew she was going to speak again. I heard the sobs in her voice as she said, "I hope it's not wrong—not wicked—but, oh! I am so glad poor Deborah is spared this. She could not have borne to come down in the world—she had such a noble, lofty spirit."

This was all she said about the sister who had insisted upon investing their little property in that unlucky bank. We were later in lighting the candle than usual that night, and, until that light shamed us into speaking, we sat together very silently and sadly.

However, we took to our work after tea with a kind of forced cheerfulness (which soon became real as far as it went), talking of that never-ending wonder, Lady Glenmire's engagement. Miss Matty was almost coming round to think it a good thing.

"I don't mean to deny that men are troublesome in a house. I don't judge from my own experience, for my father was neatness itself, and wiped his shoes on coming in as carefully as any woman; but still a man has a sort of knowledge of what should be done in difficulties, that it is very pleasant to have one at hand ready to lean upon. Now, Lady Glenmire, instead of being tossed about, and wondering where she is to settle, will be certain of a home among pleasant and kind people, such as our good Miss Pole and Mrs. Forrester. And Mr. Hoggins is really a very personable man; and as for his manners, why, if they are not very polished, I have known people with very good hearts, and very clever minds too, who were not what some people reckoned refined, but who were both true and tender."

She fell off into a soft reverie about Mr. Holbrook, and I did not interrupt her, I was so busy maturing a plan I had had in my mind for some days, but which this threatened

failure of the bank had brought to a crisis. That night, after Miss Matty went to bed, I treacherously lighted the candle again, and sat down in the drawing-room to compose a letter to the Aga Jenkyns, a letter which should affect him if he were Peter, and yet seem a mere statement of dry facts if he were a stranger. The church clock pealed out two before I had done.

The next morning news came, both official and otherwise, that the Town and County Bank had stopped payment. Miss Matty was ruined.

She tried to speak quietly to me; but when she came to the actual fact that she would have but about five shillings a week to live upon, she could not restrain a few tears.

"I am not crying for myself, dear," said she, wiping them away; "I believe I am crying for the very silly thought of how my mother would grieve if she could know; she always cared for us so much more than for herself. But many a poor person has less, and I am not very extravagant, and, thank God, when the neck of mutton, and Martha's wages, and the rent are paid, I have not a farthing owing. Poor Martha! I think she'll be sorry to leave me."

Miss Matty smiled at me through her tears, and she would fain have had me see only the smile, not the tears.

CHAPTER XIV

FRIENDS IN NEED

It was an example to me, and I fancy it might be to many others, to see how immediately Miss Matty set about the retrenchment which she knew to be right under her altered circumstances. While she went down to speak to Martha, and break the intelligence to her, I stole out with my letter

to the Aga Jenkyns, and went to the signor's lodgings to obtain the exact address. I bound the signora to secrecy; and indeed her military manners had a degree of shortness and reserve in them which made her always say as little as possible, except when under the pressure of strong excitement. Moreover (which made my secret doubly sure), the signor was now so far recovered as to be looking forward to travelling and conjuring again in the space of a few days, when he, his wife, and little Phœbe would leave Cranford. Indeed, I found him looking over a great black and red placard, in which the Signor Brunoni's accomplishments were set forth, and to which only the name of the town where he would next display them was wanting. He and his wife were so much absorbed in deciding where the red letters would come in with most effect (it might have been the Rubric for that matter), that it was some time before I could get my question asked privately, and not before I had given several decisions, the wisdom of which I questioned afterwards with equal sincerity as soon as the signor threw in his doubts and reasons on the important subject. At last I got the address, spelt by sound, and very queer it looked. I dropped it in the post on my way home, and then for a minute I stood looking at the wooden pane with a gaping slit which divided me from the letter but a moment ago in my hand. It was gone from me like life, never to be recalled. It would get tossed about on the sea, and stained with sea-waves perhaps, and be carried among palm-trees, and scented with all tropical fragrance; the little piece of paper, but an hour ago so familiar and commonplace, had set out on its race to the strange wild countries beyond the Ganges! But I could not afford to lose much time on this speculation. I hastened home, that Miss Matty might not miss me. Martha opened the door to me, her face swollen with crying. As soon as she saw me she burst out afresh, and taking hold of my arm she pulled me in, and banged the door to, in order to ask me if indeed it was all true that Miss Matty had been saying.

"I'll never leave her! No; I won't. I telled her so, and said I could not think how she could find in her heart to give me warning. I could not have had the face to do it, if I'd been her. I might ha' been just as good for nothing as Mrs. Fitz-Adam's Rosy, who struck for wages after living seven years and a half in one place. I said I was not one to go and serve Mammon at that rate; that I knew when I'd got a good missus, if she didn't know when she'd got a good servant"——

"But, Martha," said I, cutting in while she wiped her eyes.

"Don't 'but Martha' me," she replied to my deprecatory tone.

"Listen to reason"——

"I'll not listen to reason," she said, now in full possession of her voice, which had been rather choked with sobbing. "Reason always means what some one else has got to say. Now I think what I've got to say is good enough reason; but, reason or not, I'll say it, and I'll stick to it. I've money in the Savings Bank, and I've a good stock of clothes, and I'm not going to leave Miss Matty. No, not if she gives me warning every hour in the day!"

She put her arms akimbo, as much as to say she defied me; and, indeed, I could hardly tell how to begin to remonstrate with her, so much did I feel that Miss Matty, in her increasing infirmity, needed the attendance of this kind and faithful woman.

"Well"—— said I at last.

"I'm thankful you begin with 'well!' If you'd ha' begun with 'but,' as you did afore, I'd not ha' listened to you. Now you may go on."

"I know you would be a great loss to Miss Matty, Martha"——

"I telled her so. A loss she'd never cease to be sorry for," broke in Martha triumphantly.

"Still, she will have so little—so very little—to live upon, that I don't see just now how she could find you food—she

will even be pressed for her own. I tell you this, Martha, because I feel you are like a friend to dear Miss Matty, but you know she might not like to have it spoken about."

Apparently this was even a blacker view of the subject than Miss Matty had presented to her, for Martha just sat down on the first chair that came to hand, and cried out loud (we had been standing in the kitchen).

At last she put her apron down, and looking me earnestly in the face, asked, "Was that the reason Miss Matty wouldn't order a pudding to-day? She said she had no great fancy for sweet things, and you and she would just have a mutton-chop. But I'll be up to her. Never you tell, but I'll make her a pudding, and a pudding she'll like, too, and I'll pay for it myself; so mind you see she eats it. Many a one has been comforted in their sorrow by seeing a good dish come upon the table."

I was rather glad that Martha's energy had taken the immediate and practical direction of pudding-making, for it staved off the quarrelsome discussion as to whether she should or should not leave Miss Matty's service. She began to tie on a clean apron, and otherwise prepare herself for going to the shop for the butter, eggs, and what else she might require. She would not use a scrap of the articles already in the house for her cookery, but went to an old tea-pot in which her private store of money was deposited, and took out what she wanted.

I found Miss Matty very quiet, and not a little sad; but by-and-by she tried to smile for my sake. It was settled that I was to write to my father, and ask him to come over and hold a consultation, and as soon as this letter was despatched we began to talk over future plans. Miss Matty's idea was to take a single room, and retain as much of her furniture as would be necessary to fit up this, and sell the rest, and there to quietly exist upon what would remain after paying the rent. For my part, I was more ambitious and less contented. I thought of all the things by which a woman, past middle age, and with the education common to

ladies fifty years ago, could earn or add to a living without materially losing caste; but at length I put even this last clause on one side, and wondered what in the world Miss Matty could do.

Teaching was, of course, the first thing that suggested itself. If Miss Matty could teach children anything, it would throw her among the little elves in whom her soul delighted. I ran over her accomplishments. Once upon a time I had heard her say she could play "Ah! vous dirai-je, maman?" on the piano, but that was long, long ago; that faint shadow of musical acquirement had died out years before. She had also once been able to trace out patterns very nicely for muslin embroidery, by dint of placing a piece of silver paper over the design to be copied, and holding both against the window-pane while she marked the scollop and eyelet-holes. But that was her nearest approach to the accomplishment of drawing, and I did not think it would go very far. Then again, as to the branches of a solid English education—fancy work and the use of the globes—such as the mistress of the Ladies' Seminary, to which all the tradespeople in Cranford sent their daughters, professed to teach. Miss Matty's eyes were failing her, and I doubted if she could discover the number of threads in a worsted-work pattern, or rightly appreciate the different shades required for Queen Adelaide's face in the loyal wool-work now fashionable in Cranford. As for the use of the globes, I had never been able to find it out myself, so perhaps I was not a good judge of Miss Matty's capability of instructing in this branch of education; but it struck me that equators and tropics, and such mystical circles, were very imaginary lines indeed to her, and that she looked upon the signs of the Zodiac as so many remnants of the Black Art.

What she piqued herself upon, as arts in which she excelled, was making candle-lighters, or "spills" (as she preferred calling them), of coloured paper, cut so as to resemble feathers, and knitting garters in a variety of dainty stitches. I had once said, on receiving a present of an elaborate pair,

that I should feel quite tempted to drop one of them in the street, in order to have it admired; but I found this little joke (and it was a very little one) was such a distress to her sense of propriety, and was taken with such anxious, earnest alarm, lest the temptation might some day prove too strong for me, that I quite regretted having ventured upon it. A present of these delicately-wrought garters, a bunch of gay "spills," or a set of cards on which sewing-silk was wound in a mystical manner, were the well-known tokens of Miss Matty's favour. But would any one pay to have their children taught these arts? or, indeed, would Miss Matty sell, for filthy lucre, the knack and the skill with which she made trifles of value to those who loved her?

I had to come down to reading, writing, and arithmetic; and, in reading the chapter every morning, she always coughed before coming to long words. I doubted her power of getting through a genealogical chapter, with any number of coughs. Writing she did well and delicately—but spelling! She seemed to think that the more out-of-the-way this was, and the more trouble it cost her, the greater the compliment she paid to her correspondent; and words that she would spell quite correctly in her letters to me became perfect enigmas when she wrote to my father.

No! there was nothing she could teach to the rising generation of Cranford, unless they had been quick learners and ready imitators of her patience, her humility, her sweetness, her quiet contentment with all that she could not do. I pondered and pondered until dinner was announced by Martha, with a face all blubbered and swollen with crying.

Miss Matty had a few little peculiarities which Martha was apt to regard as whims below her attention, and appeared to consider as childish fancies of which an old lady of fifty-eight should try and cure herself. But to-day everything was attended to with the most careful regard. The bread was cut to the imaginary pattern of excellence that existed in Miss Matty's mind, as being the way which her mother had preferred, the curtain was drawn so as to exclude the

dead brickwall of a neighbour's stables, and yet left so as to show every tender leaf of the poplar which was bursting into spring beauty. Martha's tone to Miss Matty was just such as that good, rough-spoken servant usually kept sacred for little children, and which I had never heard her use to any grown-up person.

I had forgotten to tell Miss Matty about the pudding, and I was afraid she might not do justice to it, for she had evidently very little appetite this day; so I seized the opportunity of letting her into the secret while Martha took away the meat. Miss Matty's eyes filled with tears, and she could not speak, either to express surprise or delight, when Martha returned bearing it aloft, made in the most wonderful representation of a lion *couchant* that ever was moulded. Martha's face gleamed with triumph as she set it down before Miss Matty with an exultant "There!" Miss Matty wanted to speak her thanks, but could not; so she took Martha's hand and shook it warmly, which set Martha off crying, and I myself could hardly keep up the necessary composure. Martha burst out of the room, and Miss Matty had to clear her voice once or twice before she could speak. At last she said, "I should like to keep this pudding under a glass shade, my dear!" and the notion of the lion *couchant*, with his currant eyes, being hoisted up to the place of honour on a mantelpiece, tickled my hysterical fancy, and I began to laugh, which rather surprised Miss Matty.

"I am sure, dear, I have seen uglier things under a glass shade before now," said she.

So had I, many a time and oft, and I accordingly composed my countenance (and now I could hardly keep from crying), and we both fell to upon the pudding, which was indeed excellent—only every morsel seemed to choke us, our hearts were so full.

We had too much to think about to talk much that afternoon. It passed over very tranquilly. But when the tea-urn was brought in a new thought came into my head. Why should not Miss Matty sell tea—be an agent to the East

India Tea Company which then existed? I could see no objections to this plan, while the advantages were many—always supposing that Miss Matty could get over the degradation of condescending to anything like trade. Tea was neither greasy nor sticky—grease and stickiness being two of the qualities which Miss Matty could not endure. No shop-window would be required. A small, genteel notification of her being licensed to sell tea would, it is true, be necessary, but I hoped that it could be placed where no one would see it. Neither was tea a heavy article, so as to tax Miss Matty's fragile strength. The only thing against my plan was the buying and selling involved.

While I was giving but absent answers to the questions Miss Matty was putting—almost as absently—we heard a clumping sound on the stairs, and a whispering outside the door, which indeed once opened and shut as if by some invisible agency. After a little while Martha came in, dragging after her a great tall young man, all crimson with shyness, and finding his only relief in perpetually sleeking down his hair.

"Please, ma'am, he's only Jem Hearn," said Martha, by way of an introduction; and so out of breath was she that I imagine she had had some bodily struggle before she could overcome his reluctance to be presented on the courtly scene of Miss Matilda Jenkyns's drawing-room.

"And please, ma'am, he wants to marry me off-hand. And please, ma'am, we want to take a lodger—just one quiet lodger, to make our two ends meet; and we'd take any house conformable; and oh dear Miss Matty, if I may be so bold, would you have any objections to lodging with us? Jem wants it as much as I do." [To Jem:]—"You great oaf! why can't you back me?—But he does want it all the same, very bad—don't you, Jem?—only, you see, he's dazed at being called on to speak before quality."

"It's not that," broke in Jem. "It's that you've taken me all on a sudden, and I didn't think for to get married so soon—and such quick work does flabbergast a man. It's

not that I'm against it, ma'am" (addressing Miss Matty), "only Martha has such quick ways with her when once she takes a thing into her head; and marriage, ma'am—marriage nails a man, as one may say. I dare say I shan't mind it after it's once over."

"Please, ma'am," said Martha—who had plucked at his sleeve, and nudged him with her elbow, and otherwise tried to interrupt him all the time he had been speaking—"don't mind him, he'll come to; 'twas only last night he was an-axing me, and an-axing me, and all the more because I said I could not think of it for years to come, and now he's only taken aback with the suddenness of the joy; but you know, Jem, you are just as full as me about wanting a lodger." (Another great nudge.)

"Ah! if Miss Matty would lodge with us—otherwise I've no mind to be cumbered with strange folk in the house," said Jem, with a want of tact which I could see enraged Martha, who was trying to represent a lodger as the great object they wished to obtain, and that, in fact, Miss Matty would be smoothing their path and conferring a favour, if she would only come and live with them.

Miss Matty herself was bewildered by the pair; their, or rather Martha's sudden resolution in favour of matrimony staggered her, and stood between her and the contemplation of the plan which Martha had at heart. Miss Matty began—

"Marriage is a very solemn thing, Martha."

"It is indeed, ma'am," quoth Jem. "Not that I've no objections to Martha."

"You've never let me a-be for asking me for to fix when I would be married," said Martha—her face all a-fire, and ready to cry with vexation—"and now you're shaming me before my missus and all."

"Nay, now! Martha, don't ee! don't ee! only a man likes to have breathing-time," said Jem, trying to possess himself of her hand, but in vain. Then, seeing that she was more seriously hurt than he had imagined, he seemed to

try to rally his scattered faculties, and with more straightforward dignity than, ten minutes before, I should have thought it possible for him to assume, he turned to Miss Matty, and said, "I hope, ma'am, you know that I am bound to respect every one who has been kind to Martha. I always looked on her as to be my wife—some time; and she has often and often spoken of you as the kindest lady that ever was; and though the plain truth is, I would not like to be troubled with lodgers of the common run, yet if, ma'am, you'd honour us by living with us, I'm sure Martha would do her best to make you comfortable; and I'd keep out of your way as much as I could, which I reckon would be the best kindness such an awkward chap as me could do."

Miss Matty had been very busy with taking off her spectacles, wiping them, and replacing them; but all she could say was, "Don't let any thought of me hurry you into marriage: pray don't! Marriage is such a very solemn thing!"

"But Miss Matilda will think of your plan, Martha," said I, struck with the advantages that it offered, and unwilling to lose the opportunity of considering about it. "And I'm sure neither she nor I can ever forget your kindness; nor yours either, Jem."

"Why, yes, ma'am! I'm sure I mean kindly, though I'm a bit fluttered by being pushed straight ahead into matrimony, as it were, and mayn't express myself conformable. But I'm sure I'm willing enough, and give me time to get accustomed; so, Martha, wench, what's the use of crying so, and slapping me if I come near?"

This last was *sotto voce*, and had the effect of making Martha bounce out of the room, to be followed and soothed by her lover. Whereupon Miss Matty sat down and cried very heartily, and accounted for it by saying that the thought of Martha being married so soon gave her quite a shock, and that she should never forgive herself if she thought she was hurrying the poor creature. I think my pity was more for Jem, of the two; but both Miss Matty and I appreciated to

the full the kindness of the honest couple, although we said little about this, and a good deal about the chances and dangers of matrimony.

The next morning, very early, I received a note from Miss Pole, so mysteriously wrapped up, and with so many seals on it to secure secrecy, that I had to tear the paper before I could unfold it. And when I came to the writing I could hardly understand the meaning, it was so involved and oracular. I made out, however, that I was to go to Miss Pole's at eleven o'clock; the number *eleven* being written in full length as well as in numerals, and *A.M.* twice dashed under, as if I were very likely to come at eleven at night, when all Cranford was usually a-bed and asleep by ten. There was no signature except Miss Pole's initials reversed, P. E.; but as Martha had given me the note, "with Miss Pole's kind regards," it needed no wizard to find out who sent it; and, if the writer's name was to be kept secret, it was very well that I was alone when Martha delivered it.

I went as requested to Miss Pole's. The door was opened to me by her little maid Lizzy in Sunday trim, as if some grand event was impending over this work-day. And the drawing-room upstairs was arranged in accordance with this idea. The table was set out with the best green card-cloth, and writing materials upon it. On the little chiffonier was a tray with a newly-decanted bottle of cowslip wine, and some ladies'-finger biscuits. Miss Pole herself was in solemn array, as if to receive visitors, although it was only eleven o'clock. Mrs. Forrester was there, crying quietly and sadly, and my arrival seemed only to call forth fresh tears. Before we had finished our greetings, performed with lugubrious mystery of demeanour, there was another rat-tat-tat, and Mrs. Fitz-Adam appeared, crimson with walking and excitement. It seemed as if this was all the company expected; for now Miss Pole made several demonstrations of being about to open the business of the meeting, by stirring the fire, opening and shutting the door, and coughing and blowing her nose. Then she arranged us all round the table, taking care to

place me opposite to her; and last of all, she inquired of me if the sad report was true, as she feared it was, that Miss Matty had lost all her fortune?

Of course, I had but one answer to make; and I never saw more unaffected sorrow depicted on any countenances than I did there on the three before me.

"I wish Mrs. Jamieson was here!" said Mrs. Forrester at last; but, to judge from Mrs. Fitz-Adam's face, she could not second the wish.

"But without Mrs. Jamieson," said Miss Pole, with just a sound of offended merit in her voice, "we, the ladies of Cranford, in my drawing-room assembled, can resolve upon something. I imagine we are none of us what may be called rich, though we all possess a genteel competency, sufficient for tastes that are elegant and refined, and would not, if they could, be vulgarly ostentatious." (Here I observed Miss Pole refer to a small card concealed in her hand, on which I imagine she had put down a few notes.)

"Miss Smith," she continued, addressing me (familiarly known as "Mary" to all the company assembled, but this was a state occasion), "I have conversed in private—I made it my business to do so yesterday afternoon—with these ladies on the misfortune which has happened to our friend, and one and all of us have agreed that while we have a superfluity, it is not only a duty, but a pleasure—a true pleasure, Mary!"—her voice was rather choked just here, and she had to wipe her spectacles before she could go on—"to give what we can to assist her—Miss Matilda Jenkyns. Only in consideration of the feelings of delicate independence existing in the mind of every refined female"—I was sure she had got back to the card now—"we wish to contribute our mites in a secret and concealed manner, so as not to hurt the feelings I have referred to. And our object in requesting you to meet us this morning is that, believing you are the daughter—that your father is, in fact, her confidential adviser in all pecuniary matters, we imagined that, by consulting with him, you might devise some mode in which

our contribution could be made to appear the legal due which Miss Matilda Jenkyns ought to receive from—— Probably your father, knowing her investments, can fill up the blank."

Miss Pole concluded her address, and looked round for approval and agreement.

"I have expressed your meaning, ladies, have I not? And while Miss Smith considers what reply to make, allow me to offer you some little refreshment."

I had no great reply to make: I had more thankfulness at my heart for their kind thoughts than I cared to put into words; and so I only mumbled out something to the effect "that I would name what Miss Pole had said to my father, and that if anything could be arranged for dear Miss Matty," —and here I broke down utterly, and had to be refreshed with a glass of cowslip wine before I could check the crying which had been repressed for the last two or three days. The worst was, all the ladies cried in concert. Even Miss Pole cried, who had said a hundred times that to betray emotion before any one was a sign of weakness and want of self-control. She recovered herself into a slight degree of impatient anger, directed against me, as having set them all off; and, moreover, I think she was vexed that I could not make a speech back in return for hers; and if I had known beforehand what was to be said, and had a card on which to express the probable feelings that would rise in my heart, I would have tried to gratify her. As it was, Mrs. Forrester was the person to speak when we had recovered our composure.

"I don't mind, among friends, stating that I—no! I'm not poor exactly, but I don't think I'm what you may call rich; I wish I were, for dear Miss Matty's sake—but, if you please, I'll write down in a sealed paper what I can give. I only wish it was more: my dear Mary, I do indeed."

Now I saw why paper, pens, and ink were provided. Every lady wrote down the sum she could give annually, signed the paper, and sealed it mysteriously. If their proposal was acceded to, my father was to be allowed to

open the papers, under pledge of secrecy. If not, they were to be returned to their writers.

When this ceremony had been gone through, I rose to depart; but each lady seemed to wish to have a private conference with me. Miss Pole kept me in the drawing-room to explain why, in Mrs. Jamieson's absence, she had taken the lead in this "movement," as she was pleased to call it, and also to inform me that she had heard from good sources that Mrs. Jamieson was coming home directly in a state of high displeasure against her sister-in-law, who was forthwith to leave her house, and was, she believed, to return to Edinburgh that very afternoon. Of course this piece of intelligence could not be communicated before Mrs. Fitz-Adam, more especially as Miss Pole was inclined to think that Lady Glenmire's engagement to Mr. Hoggins could not possibly hold against the blaze of Mrs. Jamieson's displeasure. A few hearty inquiries after Miss Matty's health concluded my interview with Miss Pole.

On coming downstairs I found Mrs. Forrester waiting for me at the entrance to the dining-parlour; she drew me in, and when the door was shut, she tried two or three times to begin on some subject, which was so unapproachable apparently, that I began to despair of our ever getting to a clear understanding. At last out it came; the poor old lady trembling all the time as if it were a great crime which she was exposing to daylight, in telling me how very, very little she had to live upon; a confession which she was brought to make from a dread lest we should think that the small contribution named in her paper bore any proportion to her love and regard for Miss Matty. And yet that sum which she so eagerly relinquished was, in truth, more than a twentieth part of what she had to live upon, and keep house, and a little serving-maid, all as became one born a Tyrrell. And when the whole income does not nearly amount to a hundred pounds, to give up a twentieth of it will necessitate many careful economies, and many pieces of self-denial, small and insignificant in the world's account, but bearing a

different value in another account-book that I have heard of. She did so wish she was rich, she said, and this wish she kept repeating, with no thought of herself in it, only with a longing, yearning desire to be able to heap up Miss Matty's measure of comforts.

It was some time before I could console her enough to leave her; and then, on quitting the house, I was waylaid by Mrs. Fitz-Adam, who had also her confidence to make of pretty nearly the opposite description. She had not liked to put down all that she could afford and was ready to give. She told me she thought she never could look Miss Matty in the face again if she presumed to be giving her so much as she should like to do. "Miss Matty!" continued she, "that I thought was such a fine young lady when I was nothing but a country girl, coming to market with eggs and butter and such like things. For my father, though well-to-do, would always make me go on as my mother had done before me, and I had to come into Cranford every Saturday, and see after sales, and prices, and what not. And one day, I remember, I met Miss Matty in the lane that leads to Combehurst; she was walking on the footpath, which, you know, is raised a good way above the road, and a gentleman rode beside her, and was talking to her, and she was looking down at some primroses she had gathered, and pulling them all to pieces, and I do believe she was crying. But after she had passed, she turned round and ran after me to ask—oh, so kindly—about my poor mother, who lay on her death-bed; and when I cried she took hold of my hand to comfort me—and the gentleman waiting for her all the time—and her poor heart very full of something, I am sure; and I thought it such an honour to be spoken to in that pretty way by the rector's daughter, who visited at Arley Hall. I have loved her ever since, though perhaps I'd no right to do it; but if you can think of any way in which I might be allowed to give a little more without any one knowing it I should be so much obliged to you, my dear. And my brother would be delighted to doctor her for nothing—medicines, leeches, and

all. I know that he and her ladyship (my dear, I little thought in the days I was telling you of that I should ever come to be sister-in-law to a ladyship!) would do anything for her. We all would."

I told her I was quite sure of it, and promised all sorts of things in my anxiety to get home to Miss Matty, who might well be wondering what had become of me—absent from her two hours without being able to account for it. She had taken very little note of time, however, as she had been occupied in numberless little arrangements preparatory to the great step of giving up her house. It was evidently a relief to her to be doing something in the way of retrenchment, for, as she said, whenever she paused to think, the recollection of the poor fellow with his bad five-pound note came over her, and she felt quite dishonest; only, if it made her so uncomfortable, what must it not be doing to the directors of the bank, who must know so much more of the misery consequent upon this failure? She almost made me angry by dividing her sympathy between these directors (whom she imagined overwhelmed by self-reproach for the mismanagement of other people's affairs) and those who were suffering like her. Indeed, of the two, she seemed to think poverty a lighter burden than self-reproach; but I privately doubted if the directors would agree with her.

Old hoards were taken out and examined as to their money value, which luckily was small, or else I don't know how Miss Matty would have prevailed upon herself to part with such things as her mother's wedding-ring, the strange, uncouth brooch with which her father had disfigured his shirt-frill, &c. However, we arranged things a little in order as to their pecuniary estimation, and were all ready for my father when he came the next morning.

I am not going to weary you with the details of all the business we went through; and one reason for not telling about them is, that I did not understand what we were doing at the time, and cannot recollect it now. Miss Matty and I sat assenting to accounts, and schemes, and reports,

and documents, of which I do not believe we either of us understood a word; for my father was clear-headed and decisive, and a capital man of business, and if we made the slightest inquiry, or expressed the slightest want of comprehension, he had a sharp way of saying, "Eh? eh? it's as clear as daylight. What's your objection?" And as we had not comprehended anything of what he had proposed, we found it rather difficult to shape our objections; in fact, we never were sure if we had any. So presently Miss Matty got into a nervously acquiescent state, and said "Yes," and "Certainly," at every pause, whether required or not; but when I once joined in as chorus to a "Decidedly," pronounced by Miss Matty in a tremblingly dubious tone, my father fired round at me and asked me "What there was to decide?" And I am sure to this day I have never known. But, in justice to him, I must say he had come over from Drumble to help Miss Matty when he could ill spare the time, and when his own affairs were in a very anxious state.

While Miss Matty was out of the room giving orders for luncheon—and sadly perplexed between her desire of honouring my father by a delicate, dainty meal, and her conviction that she had no right, now that all her money was gone, to indulge this desire—I told him of the meeting of the Cranford ladies at Miss Pole's the day before. He kept brushing his hand before his eyes as I spoke—and when I went back to Martha's offer the evening before, of receiving Miss Matty as a lodger, he fairly walked away from me to the window, and began drumming with his fingers upon it. Then he turned abruptly round, and said, "See, Mary, how a good, innocent life makes friends all around. Confound it! I could make a good lesson out of it if I were a parson; but, as it is, I can't get a tail to my sentences—only I'm sure you feel what I want to say. You and I will have a walk after lunch and talk a bit more about these plans."

The lunch—a hot savoury mutton-chop, and a little of the cold lion sliced and fried—was now brought in. Every morsel

of this last dish was finished, to Martha's great gratification. Then my father bluntly told Miss Matty he wanted to talk to me alone, and that he would stroll out and see some of the old places, and then I could tell her what plan we thought desirable. Just before we went out, she called me back and said, "Remember, dear, I'm the only one left—I mean, there's no one to be hurt by what I do. I'm willing to do anything that's right and honest; and I don't think, if Deborah knows where she is, she'll care so very much if I'm not genteel; because, you see, she'll know all, dear. Only let me see what I can do, and pay the poor people as far as I'm able."

I gave her a hearty kiss, and ran after my father. The result of our conversation was this. If all parties were agreeable, Martha and Jem were to be married with as little delay as possible, and they were to live on in Miss Matty's present abode; the sum which the Cranford ladies had agreed to contribute annually being sufficient to meet the greater part of the rent, and leaving Martha free to appropriate what Miss Matty should pay for her lodgings to any little extra comforts required. About the sale, my father was dubious at first. He said the old rectory furniture, however carefully used and reverently treated, would fetch very little; and that little would be but as a drop in the sea of the debts of the Town and County Bank. But when I represented how Miss Matty's tender conscience would be soothed by feeling that she had done what she could, he gave way; especially after I had told him the five-pound note adventure, and he had scolded me well for allowing it. I then alluded to my idea that she might add to her small income by selling tea; and, to my surprise (for I had nearly given up the plan), my father grasped at it with all the energy of a tradesman. I think he reckoned his chickens before they were hatched, for he immediately ran up the profits of the sales that she could effect in Cranford to more than twenty pounds a year. The small dining-parlour was to be converted into a shop, without any of its degrading characteristics; a table was to

be the counter; one window was to be retained unaltered, and the other changed into a glass door. I evidently rose in his estimation for having made this bright suggestion. I only hoped we should not both fall in Miss Matty's.

But she was patient and content with all our arrangements. She knew, she said, that we should do the best we could for her; and she only hoped, only stipulated, that she should pay every farthing that she could be said to owe, for her father's sake, who had been so respected in Cranford. My father and I had agreed to say as little as possible about the bank, indeed never to mention it again, if it could be helped. Some of the plans were evidently a little perplexing to her; but she had seen me sufficiently snubbed in the morning for want of comprehension to venture on too many inquiries now; and all passed over well with a hope on her part that no one would be hurried into marriage on her account. When we came to the proposal that she should sell tea, I could see it was rather a shock to her; not on account of any personal loss of gentility involved, but only because she distrusted her own powers of action in a new line of life, and would timidly have preferred a little more privation to any exertion for which she feared she was unfitted. However, when she saw my father was bent upon it, she sighed, and said she would try; and if she did not do well, of course she might give it up. One good thing about it was, she did not think men ever bought tea; and it was of men particularly she was afraid. They had such sharp loud ways with them; and did up accounts, and counted their change so quickly! Now, if she might only sell comfits to children, she was sure she could please them!

CHAPTER XV

A HAPPY RETURN

BEFORE I left Miss Matty at Cranford everything had been comfortably arranged for her. Even Mrs. Jamieson's approval of her selling tea had been gained. That oracle had taken a few days to consider whether by so doing Miss Matty would forfeit her right to the privileges of society in Cranford. I think she had some little idea of mortifying Lady Glenmire by the decision she gave at last; which was to this effect: that whereas a married woman takes her husband's rank by the strict laws of precedence, an unmarried woman retains the station her father occupied. So Cranford was allowed to visit Miss Matty; and, whether allowed or not, it intended to visit Lady Glenmire.

But what was our surprise—our dismay—when we learnt that Mr. and *Mrs. Hoggins* were returning on the following Tuesday. Mrs. Hoggins! Had she absolutely dropped her title, and so, in a spirit of bravado, cut the aristocracy to become a Hoggins! She, who might have been called Lady Glenmire to her dying day! Mrs. Jamieson was pleased. She said it only convinced her of what she had known from the first, that the creature had a low taste. But "the creature" looked very happy on Sunday at church; nor did we see it necessary to keep our veils down on that side of our bonnets on which Mr. and Mrs. Hoggins sat, as Mrs. Jamieson did; thereby missing all the smiling glory of his face, and all the becoming blushes of hers. I am not sure if Martha and Jem looked more radiant in the afternoon, when they, too, made their first appearance. Mrs. Jamieson soothed the turbulence of her soul by having the blinds of her windows drawn down, as if for a funeral, on the day when Mr. and Mrs. Hoggins received callers: and it was with some difficulty that she was prevailed upon to continue

the *St. James's Chronicle*, so indignant was she with its having inserted the announcement of the marriage.

Miss Matty's sale went off famously. She retained the furniture of her sitting-room and bedroom; the former of which she was to occupy till Martha could meet with a lodger who might wish to take it; and into this sitting-room and bedroom she had to cram all sorts of things, which were (the auctioneer assured her) bought in for her at the sale by an unknown friend. I always suspected Mrs. Fitz-Adam of this; but she must have had an accessory, who knew what articles were particularly regarded by Miss Matty on account of their associations with her early days. The rest of the house looked rather bare, to be sure; all except one tiny bedroom, of which my father allowed me to purchase the furniture for my occasional use in case of Miss Matty's illness.

I had expended my own small store in buying all manner of comfits and lozenges, in order to tempt the little people whom Miss Matty loved so much to come about her. Tea in bright green canisters, and comfits in tumblers—Miss Matty and I felt quite proud as we looked round us on the evening before the shop was to be opened. Martha had scoured the boarded floor to a white cleanness, and it was adorned with a brilliant piece of oil-cloth, on which customers were to stand before the table-counter. The wholesome smell of plaster and whitewash pervaded the apartment. A very small "Matilda Jenkyns, licensed to sell tea," was hidden under the lintel of the new door, and two boxes of tea, with cabalistic inscriptions all over them, stood ready to disgorge their contents into the canisters.

Miss Matty, as I ought to have mentioned before, had had some scruples of conscience at selling tea when there was already Mr. Johnson in the town, who included it among his numerous commodities; and, before she could quite reconcile herself to the adoption of her new business, she had trotted down to his shop, unknown to me, to tell him of the project that was entertained, and to inquire if it was

likely to injure his business. My father called this idea of hers "great nonsense," and "wondered how tradespeople were to get on if there was to be a continual consulting of each other's interests, which would put a stop to all competition directly." And, perhaps, it would not have done in Drumble, but in Cranford it answered very well; for not only did Mr. Johnson kindly put at rest all Miss Matty's scruples and fear of injuring his business, but I have reason to know he repeatedly sent customers to her, saying that the teas he kept were of a common kind, but that Miss Jenkyns had all the choice sorts. And expensive tea is a very favourite luxury with well-to-do tradespeople and rich farmers' wives, who turn up their noses at the Congou and Souchong prevalent at many tables of gentility, and will have nothing else than Gunpowder and Pekoe for themselves.

But to return to Miss Matty. It was really very pleasant to see how her unselfishness and simple sense of justice called out the same good qualities in others. She never seemed to think any one would impose upon her, because she should be so grieved to do it to them. I have heard her put a stop to the asseverations of the man who brought her coals by quietly saying, "I am sure you would be sorry to bring me wrong weight;" and if the coals were short measure that time, I don't believe they ever were again. People would have felt as much ashamed of presuming on her good faith as they would have done on that of a child. But my father says "such simplicity might be very well in Cranford, but would never do in the world." And I fancy the world must be very bad, for with all my father's suspicion of every one with whom he has dealings, and in spite of all his many precautions, he lost upwards of a thousand pounds by roguery only last year.

I just stayed long enough to establish Miss Matty in her new mode of life, and to pack up the library, which the rector had purchased. He had written a very kind letter to Miss Matty, saying "how glad he should be to take a library,

so well selected as he knew that the late Mr. Jenkyns's must have been, at any valuation put upon them." And when she agreed to this, with a touch of sorrowful gladness that they would go back to the rectory and be arranged on the accustomed walls once more, he sent word that he feared that he had not room for them all, and perhaps Miss Matty would kindly allow him to leave some volumes on her shelves. But Miss Matty said that she had her Bible and "Johnson's Dictionary," and should not have much time for reading, she was afraid; still, I retained a few books out of consideration for the rector's kindness.

The money which he had paid, and that produced by the sale, was partly expended in the stock of tea, and part of it was invested against a rainy day—*i.e.*, old age or illness. It was but a small sum, it is true; and it occasioned a few evasions of truth and white lies (all of which I think very wrong indeed—in theory—and would rather not put them in practice), for we knew Miss Matty would be perplexed as to her duty if she were aware of any little reserve-fund being made for her while the debts of the bank remained unpaid. Moreover, she had never been told of the way in which her friends were contributing to pay the rent. I should have liked to tell her this, but the mystery of the affair gave a piquancy to their deed of kindness which the ladies were unwilling to give up; and at first Martha had to shirk many a perplexed question as to her ways and means of living in such a house, but by-and-by Miss Matty's prudent uneasiness sank down into acquiescence with the existing arrangement.

I left Miss Matty with a good heart. Her sales of tea during the first two days had surpassed my most sanguine expectations. The whole country round seemed to be all out of tea at once. The only alteration I could have desired in Miss Matty's way of doing business was, that she should not have so plaintively entreated some of her customers not to buy green tea—running it down as slow poison, sure to destroy the nerves, and produce all manner of evil. Their

pertinacity in taking it, in spite of all her warnings, distressed her so much that I really thought she would relinquish the sale of it, and so lose half her custom; and I was driven to my wits' end for instances of longevity entirely attributable to a persevering use of green tea. But the final argument, which settled the question, was a happy reference of mine to the train-oil and tallow candles which the Esquimaux not only enjoy but digest. After that she acknowledged that "one man's meat might be another man's poison," and contented herself thenceforward with an occasional remonstrance when she thought the purchaser was too young and innocent to be acquainted with the evil effects green tea produced on some constitutions, and an habitual sigh when people old enough to choose more wisely would prefer it.

I went over from Drumble once a quarter at least to settle the accounts, and see after the necessary business letters. And, speaking of letters, I began to be very much ashamed of remembering my letter to the Aga Jenkyns, and very glad I had never named my writing to any one. I only hoped the letter was lost. No answer came. No sign was made.

About a year after Miss Matty set up shop, I received one of Martha's hieroglyphics, begging me to come to Cranford very soon. I was afraid that Miss Matty was ill, and went off that very afternoon, and took Martha by surprise when she saw me on opening the door. We went into the kitchen as usual, to have our confidential conference, and then Martha told me she was expecting her confinement very soon—in a week or two; and she did not think Miss Matty was aware of it, and she wanted me to break the news to her, "for indeed, miss," continued Martha, crying hysterically, "I'm afraid she won't approve of it, and I'm sure I don't know who is to take care of her as she should be taken care of when I am laid up."

I comforted Martha by telling her I would remain till she was about again, and only wished she had told me her reason for this sudden summons, as then I would have brought the

requisite stock of clothes. But Martha was so tearful and tender-spirited, and unlike her usual self, that I said as little as possible about myself, and endeavoured rather to comfort Martha under all the probable and possible misfortunes which came crowding upon her imagination.

I then stole out of the house-door, and made my appearance as if I were a customer in the shop, just to take Miss Matty by surprise, and gain an idea of how she looked in her new situation. It was warm May weather, so only the little half-door was closed; and Miss Matty sat behind her counter, knitting an elaborate pair of garters; elaborate they seemed to me, but the difficult stitch was no weight upon her mind, for she was singing in a low voice to herself as her needles went rapidly in and out. I call it singing, but I dare say a musician would not use that word to the tuneless yet sweet humming of the low worn voice. I found out from the words, far more than from the attempt at the tune, that it was the Old Hundredth she was crooning to herself; but the quiet continuous sound told of content, and gave me a pleasant feeling, as I stood in the street just outside the door, quite in harmony with that soft May morning. I went in. At first she did not catch who it was, and stood up as if to serve me; but in another minute watchful pussy had clutched her knitting, which was dropped in eager joy at seeing me. I found, after we had had a little conversation, that it was as Martha said, and that Miss Matty had no idea of the approaching household event. So I thought I would let things take their course, secure that when I went to her with the baby in my arms, I should obtain that forgiveness for Martha which she was needlessly frightening herself into believing that Miss Matty would withhold, under some notion that the new claimant would require attentions from its mother that it would be faithless treason to Miss Matty to render.

But I was right. I think that must be an hereditary quality, for my father says he is scarcely ever wrong. One morning, within a week after I arrived, I went to call Miss

Matty, with a little bundle of flannel in my arms. She was very much awe-struck when I showed her what it was, and asked for her spectacles off the dressing-table, and looked at it curiously, with a sort of tender wonder at its small perfection of parts. She could not banish the thought of the surprise all day, but went about on tiptoe, and was very silent. But she stole up to see Martha, and they both cried with joy, and she got into a complimentary speech to Jem, and did not know how to get out of it again, and was only extricated from her dilemma by the sound of the shop-bell, which was an equal relief to the shy, proud, honest Jem, who shook my hand so vigorously when I congratulated him that I think I feel the pain of it yet.

I had a busy life while Martha was laid up. I attended on Miss Matty, and prepared her meals; I cast up her accounts, and examined into the state of her canisters and tumblers. I helped her, too, occasionally, in the shop; and it gave me no small amusement, and sometimes a little uneasiness, to watch her ways there. If a little child came in to ask for an ounce of almond-comfits (and four of the large kind which Miss Matty sold weighed that much), she always added one more by "way of make-weight," as she called it, although the scale was handsomely turned before; and when I remonstrated against this, her reply was, "The little things like it so much!" There was no use in telling her that the fifth comfit weighed a quarter of an ounce, and made every sale into a loss to her pocket. So I remembered the green tea, and winged my shaft with a feather out of her own plumage. I told her how unwholesome almond-comfits were, and how ill excess in them might make the little children. This argument produced some effect; for, henceforward, instead of the fifth comfit, she always told them to hold out their tiny palms, into which she shook either peppermint or ginger lozenges, as a preventive to the dangers that might arise from the previous sale. Altogether the lozenge trade, conducted on these principles, did not promise to be remunerative; but I was happy to find she had made more

than twenty pounds during the last year by her sales of tea; and moreover that, now she was accustomed to it, she did not dislike the employment, which brought her into kindly intercourse with many of the people round about. If she gave them good weight, they, in their turn, brought many a little country present to the "old rector's daughter"; a cream cheese, a few new-laid eggs, a little fresh ripe fruit, a bunch of flowers. The counter was quite loaded with these offerings sometimes, as she told me.

As for Cranford in general, it was going on much as usual. The Jamieson and Hoggins feud still raged, if a feud it could be called, when only one side cared much about it. Mr. and Mrs. Hoggins were very happy together, and, like most very happy people, quite ready to be friendly; indeed, Mrs. Hoggins was really desirous to be restored to Mrs. Jamieson's good graces, because of the former intimacy. But Mrs. Jamieson considered their very happiness an insult to the Glenmire family, to which she had still the honour to belong, and she doggedly refused and rejected every advance. Mr. Mulliner, like a faithful clansman, espoused his mistress' side with ardour. If he saw either Mr. or Mrs. Hoggins, he would cross the street, and appear absorbed in the contemplation of life in general, and his own path in particular, until he had passed them by. Miss Pole used to amuse herself with wondering what in the world Mrs. Jamieson would do, if either she, or Mr. Mulliner, or any other member of her household, was taken ill; she could hardly have the face to call in Mr. Hoggins after the way she had behaved to them. Miss Pole grew quite impatient for some indisposition or accident to befall Mrs. Jamieson or her dependants, in order that Cranford might see how she would act under the perplexing circumstances.

Martha was beginning to go about again, and I had already fixed a limit, not very far distant, to my visit, when one afternoon, as I was sitting in the shop-parlour with Miss Matty—I remember the weather was colder now than it had been in May, three weeks before, and we had a fire and kept

the door fully closed—we saw a gentleman go slowly past the window, and then stand opposite to the door, as if looking out for the name which we had so carefully hidden. He took out a double eyeglass and peered about for some time before he could discover it. Then he came in. And, all on a sudden, it flashed across me that it was the Aga himself! For his clothes had an out-of-the-way foreign cut about them, and his face was deep brown, as if tanned and re-tanned by the sun. His complexion contrasted oddly with his plentiful snow-white hair, his eyes were dark and piercing, and he had an odd way of contracting them and puckering up his cheeks into innumerable wrinkles when he looked earnestly at objects. He did so to Miss Matty when he first came in. His glance had first caught and lingered a little upon me, but then turned, with the peculiar searching look I have described, to Miss Matty. She was a little fluttered and nervous, but no more so than she always was when any man came into her shop. She thought that he would probably have a note, or a sovereign at least, for which she would have to give change, which was an operation she very much disliked to perform. But the present customer stood opposite to her, without asking for anything, only looking fixedly at her as he drummed upon the table with his fingers, just for all the world as Miss Jenkyns used to do. Miss Matty was on the point of asking him what he wanted (as she told me afterwards), when he turned sharp to me: "Is your name Mary Smith?"

"Yes!" said I.

All my doubts as to his identity were set at rest, and I only wondered what he would say or do next, and how Miss Matty would stand the joyful shock of what he had to reveal. Apparently he was at a loss how to announce himself, for he looked round at last in search of something to buy, so as to gain time, and, as it happened, his eye caught on the almond-comfits, and he boldly asked for a pound of "those things." I doubt if Miss Matty had a whole pound in the shop, and, besides the unusual magnitude of the order, she was distressed

with the idea of the indigestion they would produce, taken in such unlimited quantities. She looked up to remonstrate. Something of tender relaxation in his face struck home to her heart. She said, "It is—oh sir! can you be Peter?" and trembled from head to foot. In a moment he was round the table and had her in his arms, sobbing the tearless cries of old age. I brought her a glass of wine, for indeed her colour had changed so as to alarm me and Mr. Peter too. He kept saying, "I have been too sudden for you, Matty—I have, my little girl."

I proposed that she should go at once up into the drawing-room and lie down on the sofa there. She looked wistfully at her brother, whose hand she had held tight, even when nearly fainting; but on his assuring her that he would not leave her, she allowed him to carry her upstairs.

I thought that the best I could do was to run and put the kettle on the fire for early tea, and then to attend to the shop, leaving the brother and sister to exchange some of the many thousand things they must have to say. I had also to break the news to Martha, who received it with a burst of tears which nearly infected me. She kept recovering herself to ask if I was sure it was indeed Miss Matty's brother, for I had mentioned that he had grey hair, and she had always heard that he was a very handsome young man. Something of the same kind perplexed Miss Matty at tea-time, when she was installed in the great easy-chair opposite to Mr. Jenkyns's in order to gaze her fill. She could hardly drink for looking at him, and as for eating, that was out of the question.

"I suppose hot climates age people very quickly," said she, almost to herself. "When you left Cranford you had not a grey hair in your head."

"But how many years ago is that?" said Mr. Peter, smiling.

"Ah, true! yes, I suppose you and I are getting old. But still I did not think we were so very old! But white

hair is very becoming to you, Peter," she continued—a little afraid lest she had hurt him by revealing how his appearance had impressed her.

"I suppose I forgot dates too, Matty, for what do you think I have brought for you from India? I have an Indian muslin gown and a pearl necklace for you somewhere in my chest at Portsmouth." He smiled as if amused at the idea of the incongruity of his presents with the appearance of his sister; but this did not strike her all at once, while the elegance of the articles did. I could see that for a moment her imagination dwelt complacently on the idea of herself thus attired; and instinctively she put her hand up to her throat—that little delicate throat which (as Miss Pole had told me) had been one of her youthful charms; but the hand met the touch of folds of soft muslin in which she was always swathed up to her chin, and the sensation recalled a sense of the unsuitableness of a pearl necklace to her age. She said, "I'm afraid I'm too old; but it was very kind of you to think of it. They are just what I should have liked years ago—when I was young."

"So I thought, my little Matty. I remembered your tastes; they were so like my dear mother's." At the mention of that name the brother and sister clasped each other's hands yet more fondly, and, although they were perfectly silent, I fancied they might have something to say if they were unchecked by my presence, and I got up to arrange my room for Mr. Peter's occupation that night, intending myself to share Miss Matty's bed. But at my movement he started up. "I must go and settle about a room at the 'George.' My carpet-bag is there too."

"No!" said Miss Matty, in great distress—"you must not go; please, dear Peter—pray, Mary—oh! you must not go!"

She was so much agitated that we both promised everything she wished. Peter sat down again and gave her his hand, which for better security she held in both of hers, and I left the room to accomplish my arrangements.

Long, long into the night, far, far into the morning, did Miss Matty and I talk. She had much to tell me of her brother's life and adventures, which he had communicated to her as they had sat alone. She said all was thoroughly clear to her; but I never quite understood the whole story; and when in after days I lost my awe of Mr. Peter enough to question him myself, he laughed at my curiosity, and told me stories that sounded so very much like Baron Munchausen's, that I was sure he was making fun of me. What I heard from Miss Matty was that he had been a volunteer at the siege of Rangoon; had been taken prisoner by the Burmese; had somehow obtained favour and eventual freedom from knowing how to bleed the chief of the small tribe in some case of dangerous illness; that on his release from years of captivity he had had his letters returned from England with the ominous word "Dead" marked upon them; and, believing himself to be the last of his race, he had settled down as an indigo planter, and had proposed to spend the remainder of his life in the country to whose inhabitants and modes of life he had become habituated, when my letter had reached him; and, with the odd vehemence which characterised him in age as it had done in youth, he had sold his land and all his possessions to the first purchaser, and come home to the poor old sister, who was more glad and rich than any princess when she looked at him. She talked me to sleep at last, and then I was awakened by a slight sound at the door, for which she begged my pardon as she crept penitently into bed; but it seems that when I could no longer confirm her belief that the long-lost was really here—under the same roof—she had begun to fear lest it was only a waking dream of hers; that there never had been a Peter sitting by her all that blessed evening—but that the real Peter lay dead far away beneath some wild sea-wave, or under some strange eastern tree. And so strong had this nervous feeling of hers become, that she was fain to get up and go and convince herself that he was really there by listening through the door to his even, regular breathing—I don't like to call it snoring, but I heard

it myself through two closed doors—and by-and-by it soothed Miss Matty to sleep.

I don't believe Mr. Peter came home from India as rich as a nabob; he even considered himself poor, but neither he nor Miss Matty cared much about that. At any rate, he had enough to live upon "very genteelly" at Cranford; he and Miss Matty together. And a day or two after his arrival, the shop was closed, while troops of little urchins gleefully awaited the shower of comfits and lozenges that came from time to time down upon their faces as they stood up-gazing at Miss Matty's drawing-room windows. Occasionally Miss Matty would say to them (half-hidden behind the curtains), "My dear children, don't make yourselves ill"; but a strong arm pulled her back, and a more rattling shower than ever succeeded. A part of the tea was sent in presents to the Cranford ladies; and some of it was distributed among the old people who remembered Mr. Peter in the days of his frolicsome youth. The India muslin gown was reserved for darling Flora Gordon (Miss Jessie Brown's daughter). The Gordons had been on the Continent for the last few years, but were now expected to return very soon; and Miss Matty, in her sisterly pride, anticipated great delight in the joy of showing them Mr. Peter. The pearl necklace disappeared; and about that time many handsome and useful presents made their appearance in the households of Miss Pole and Mrs. Forrester; and some rare and delicate Indian ornaments graced the drawing-rooms of Mrs. Jamieson and Mrs. Fitz-Adam. I myself was not forgotten. Among other things, I had the handsomest-bound and best edition of Dr. Johnson's works that could be procured; and dear Miss Matty, with tears in her eyes, begged me to consider it as a present from her sister as well as herself. In short, no one was forgotten; and, what was more, every one, however insignificant, who had shown kindness to Miss Matty at any time, was sure of Mr. Peter's cordial regard.

CHAPTER XVI

PEACE TO CRANFORD

It was not surprising that Mr. Peter became such a favourite at Cranford. The ladies vied with each other who should admire him most; and no wonder, for their quiet lives were astonishingly stirred up by the arrival from India—especially as the person arrived told more wonderful stories than Sindbad the Sailor; and, as Miss Pole said, was quite as good as an Arabian Night any evening. For my own part, I had vibrated all my life between Drumble and Cranford, and I thought it was quite possible that all Mr. Peter's stories might be true, although wonderful; but when I found that, if we swallowed an anecdote of tolerable magnitude one week, we had the dose considerably increased the next, I began to have my doubts; especially as I noticed that when his sister was present the accounts of Indian life were comparatively tame; not that she knew more than we did, perhaps less. I noticed also that, when the rector came to call, Mr. Peter talked in a different way about the countries he had been in. But I don't think the ladies in Cranford would have considered him such a wonderful traveller if they had only heard him talk in the quiet way he did to him. They liked him the better, indeed, for being what they called "so very Oriental."

One day, at a select party in his honour, which Miss Pole gave, and from which, as Mrs. Jamieson honoured it with her presence, and had even offered to send Mr. Mulliner to wait, Mr. and Mrs. Hoggins and Mrs. Fitz-Adam were necessarily excluded—one day at Miss Pole's, Mr. Peter said he was tired of sitting upright against the hard-backed uneasy chairs, and asked if he might not indulge himself in sitting cross-legged. Miss Pole's consent was eagerly given, and down he went with the utmost gravity. But when Miss Pole asked me, in an audible whisper, "if he did not remind me of the Father

of the Faithful?" I could not help thinking of poor Simon Jones, the lame tailor, and while Mrs. Jamieson slowly commented on the elegance and convenience of the attitude, I remembered how we had all followed that lady's lead in condemning Mr. Hoggins for vulgarity because he simply crossed his legs as he sat still on his chair. Many of Mr. Peter's ways of eating were a little strange amongst such ladies as Miss Pole, and Miss Matty, and Mrs. Jamieson, especially when I recollected the untasted green peas and two-pronged forks at poor Mr. Holbrook's dinner.

The mention of that gentleman's name recalls to my mind a conversation between Mr. Peter and Miss Matty one evening in the summer after he returned to Cranford. The day had been very hot, and Miss Matty had been much oppressed by the weather, in the heat of which her brother revelled. I remember that she had been unable to nurse Martha's baby, which had become her favourite employment of late, and which was as much at home in her arms as in its mother's, as long as it remained a light-weight, portable by one so fragile as Miss Matty. This day to which I refer, Miss Matty had seemed more than usually feeble and languid, and only revived when the sun went down, and her sofa was wheeled to the open window, through which, although it looked into the principal street of Cranford, the fragrant smell of the neighbouring hayfields came in every now and then, borne by the soft breezes that stirred the dull air of the summer twilight, and then died away. The silence of the sultry atmosphere was lost in the murmuring noises which came in from many an open window and door; even the children were abroad in the street, late as it was (between ten and eleven), enjoying the game of play for which they had not had spirits during the heat of the day. It was a source of satisfaction to Miss Matty to see how few candles were lighted, even in the apartments of those houses from which issued the greatest signs of life. Mr. Peter, Miss Matty, and I had all been quiet, each with a separate reverie, for some little time, when Mr. Peter broke in—

"Do you know, little Matty, I could have sworn you were on the high road to matrimony when I left England that last time! If anybody had told me you would have lived and died an old maid then, I should have laughed in their faces."

Miss Matty made no reply, and I tried in vain to think of some subject which should effectually turn the conversation; but I was very stupid; and before I spoke he went on—

"It was Holbrook, that fine manly fellow who lived at Woodley, that I used to think would carry off my little Matty. You would not think it now, I dare say, Mary; but this sister of mine was once a very pretty girl—at least, I thought so, and so I've a notion did poor Holbrook. What business had he to die before I came home to thank him for all his kindness to a good-for-nothing cub as I was? It was that that made me first think he cared for you; for in all our fishing expeditions it was Matty, Matty, we talked about. Poor Deborah! What a lecture she read me on having asked him home to lunch one day, when she had seen the Arley carriage in the town, and thought that my lady might call. Well, that's long years ago; more than half a lifetime, and yet if seems like yesterday! I don't know a fellow I should have liked better as a brother-in-law. You must have played your cards badly, my little Matty, somehow or another—wanted your brother to be a good go-between, eh, little one?" said he, putting out his hand to take hold of hers as she lay on the sofa. "Why, what's this? you're shivering and shaking, Matty, with that confounded open window. Shut it, Mary, this minute!"

I did so, and then stooped down to kiss Miss Matty, and see if she really were chilled. She caught at my hand, and gave it a hard squeeze—but unconsciously, I think—for in a minute or two she spoke to us quite in her usual voice, and smiled our uneasiness away, although she patiently submitted to the prescriptions we enforced of a warm bed and a glass of weak negus. I was to leave Cranford the next day, and before I went I saw that all the effects of the

open window had quite vanished. I had superintended most of the alterations necessary in the house and household during the latter weeks of my stay. The shop was once more a parlour; the empty resounding rooms again furnished up to the very garrets.

There had been some talk of establishing Martha and Jem in another house, but Miss Matty would not hear of this. Indeed, I never saw her so much roused as when Miss Pole had assumed it to be the most desirable arrangement. As long as Martha would remain with Miss Matty, Miss Matty was only too thankful to have her about her; yes, and Jem too, who was a very pleasant man to have in the house, for she never saw him from week's end to week's end. And as for the probable children, if they would all turn out such little darlings as her god-daughter, Matilda, she should not mind the number, if Martha didn't. Besides, the next was to be called Deborah—a point which Miss Matty had reluctantly yielded to Martha's stubborn determination that her first-born was to be Matilda. So Miss Pole had to lower her colours, and even her voice, as she said to me that, as Mr. and Mrs. Hearn were still to go on living in the same house with Miss Matty, we had certainly done a wise thing in hiring Martha's niece as an auxiliary.

I left Miss Matty and Mr. Peter most comfortable and contented; the only subject for regret to the tender heart of the one, and the social friendly nature of the other, being the unfortunate quarrel between Mrs. Jamieson and the plebeian Hogginses and their following. In joke, I prophesied one day that this would only last until Mrs. Jamieson or Mr. Mulliner were ill, in which case they would only be too glad to be friends with Mr. Hoggins; but Miss Matty did not like my looking forward to anything like illness in so light a manner, and before the year was out all had come round in a far more satisfactory way.

I received two Cranford letters on one auspicious October morning. Both Miss Pole and Miss Matty wrote to ask me to come over and meet the Gordons, who had returned to

England alive and well with their two children, now almost grown up. Dear Jessie Brown had kept her old kind nature, although she had changed her name and station; and she wrote to say that she and Major Gordon expected to be in Cranford on the fourteenth, and she hoped and begged to be remembered to Mrs. Jamieson (named first, as became her honourable station), Miss Pole, and Miss Matty—could she ever forget their kindness to her poor father and sister?—Mrs. Forrester, Mr. Hoggins (and here again came in an allusion to kindness shown to the dead long ago), his new wife, who as such must allow Mrs. Gordon to desire to make her acquaintance, and who was, moreover, an old Scotch friend of her husband's. In short, every one was named, from the rector—who had been appointed to Cranford in the interim between Captain Brown's death and Miss Jessie's marriage, and was now associated with the latter event—down to Miss Betsy Barker. All were asked to the luncheon; all except Mrs. Fitz-Adam, who had come to live in Cranford since Miss Jessie Brown's days, and whom I found rather moping on account of the omission. People wondered at Miss Betty Barker's being included in the honourable list; but, then, as Miss Pole said, we must remember the disregard of the genteel proprieties of life in which the poor captain had educated his girls, and for his sake we swallowed our pride. Indeed, Mrs. Jamieson rather took it as a compliment, as putting Miss Betty (formerly *her* maid) on a level with "those Hogginses."

But when I arrived in Cranford, nothing was as yet ascertained of Mrs. Jamieson's own intentions; would the honourable lady go, or would she not? Mr. Peter declared that she should and she would; Miss Pole shook her head and desponded. But Mr. Peter was a man of resources. In the first place, he persuaded Miss Matty to write to Mrs. Gordon, and to tell her of Mrs. Fitz-Adam's existence, and to beg that one so kind, and cordial, and generous, might be included in the pleasant invitation. An answer came back by return of post, with a pretty little note for Mrs.

Fitz-Adam, and a request that Miss Matty would deliver it herself and explain the previous omission. Mrs. Fitz-Adam was as pleased as could be, and thanked Miss Matty over and over again. Mr. Peter had said, "Leave Mrs. Jamieson to me;" so we did; especially as we knew nothing that we could do to alter her determination if once formed.

I did not know, nor did Miss Matty, how things were going on, until Miss Pole asked me, just the day before Mrs. Gordon came, if I thought there was anything between Mr. Peter and Mrs. Jamieson in the matrimonial line, for that Mrs. Jamieson was really going to the lunch at the "George." She had sent Mr. Mulliner down to desire that there might be a footstool put to the warmest seat in the room, as she meant to come, and knew that their chairs were very high. Miss Pole had picked this piece of news up, and from it she conjectured all sorts of things, and bemoaned yet more. "If Peter should marry, what would become of poor dear Miss Matty? And Mrs. Jamieson, of all people!" Miss Pole seemed to think there were other ladies in Cranford who would have done more credit to his choice, and I think she must have had some one who was unmarried in her head, for she kept saying, "It was so wanting in delicacy in a widow to think of such a thing."

When I got back to Miss Matty's I really did begin to think that Mr. Peter might be thinking of Mrs. Jamieson for a wife, and I was as unhappy as Miss Pole about it. He had the proof sheet of a great placard in his hand. "Signor Brunoni, Magician to the King of Delhi, the Rajah of Oude, and the great Lama of Thibet," &c. &c., was going to "perform in Cranford for one night only," the very next night; and Miss Matty, exultant, showed me a letter from the Gordons, promising to remain over this gaiety, which Miss Matty said was entirely Peter's doing. He had written to ask the signor to come, and was to be at all the expenses of the affair. Tickets were to be sent gratis to as many as the room would hold. In short, Miss Matty was charmed with the plan, and said that to-morrow Cranford would

remind her of the Preston Guild, to which she had been in her youth—a luncheon at the "George," with the dear Gordons, and the signor in the Assembly Room in the evening. But I—I looked only at the fatal words:—

"*Under the Patronage of the* HONOURABLE MRS. JAMIESON."

She, then, was chosen to preside over this entertainment of Mr. Peter's; she was perhaps going to displace my dear Miss Matty in his heart, and make her life lonely once more! I could not look forward to the morrow with any pleasure; and every innocent anticipation of Miss Matty's only served to add to my annoyance.

So, angry and irritated, and exaggerated every little incident which could add to my irritation, I went on till we were all assembled in the great parlour at the "George." Major and Mrs. Gordon and pretty Flora and Mr. Ludovic were all as bright and handsome and friendly as could be; but I could hardly attend to them for watching Mr. Peter, and I saw that Miss Pole was equally busy. I had never seen Mrs. Jamieson so roused and animated before; her face looked full of interest in what Mr. Peter was saying. I drew near to listen. My relief was great when I caught that his words were not words of love, but that, for all his grave face, he was at his old tricks. He was telling her of his travels in India, and describing the wonderful height of the Himalaya mountains: one touch after another added to their size, and each exceeded the former in absurdity; but Mrs. Jamieson really enjoyed all in perfect good faith. I suppose she required strong stimulants to excite her to come out of her apathy. Mr. Peter wound up his account by saying that, of course, at that altitude there were none of the animals to be found that existed in the lower regions; the game—everything was different. Firing one day at some flying creature, he was very much dismayed when it fell, to find that he had shot a cherubim! Mr. Peter caught my eye at this moment, and gave me such a funny twinkle, that I felt sure he had

no thoughts of Mrs. Jamieson as a wife from that time. She looked uncomfortably amazed—

"But, Mr. Peter, shooting a cherubim—don't you think—I am afraid that was sacrilege!"

Mr. Peter composed his countenance in a moment, and appeared shocked at the idea, which, as he said truly enough, was now presented to him for the first time; but then Mrs. Jamieson must remember that he had been living for a long time among savages—all of whom were heathens—some of them, he was afraid, were downright Dissenters. Then, seeing Miss Matty draw near, he hastily changed the conversation, and after a little while, turning to me, he said, "Don't be shocked, prim little Mary, at all my wonderful stories. I consider Mrs. Jamieson fair game, and besides I am bent on propitiating her, and the first step towards it is keeping her well awake. I bribed her here by asking her to let me have her name as patroness for my poor conjuror this evening; and I don't want to give her time enough to get up her rancour against the Hogginses, who are just coming in. I want everybody to be friends, for it harasses Matty so much to hear of these quarrels. I shall go at it again by-and-by, so you need not look shocked. I intend to enter the Assembly Room to-night with Mrs. Jamieson on one side, and my lady, Mrs. Hoggins, on the other. You see if I don't."

Somehow or another he did; and fairly got them into conversation together. Major and Mrs. Gordon helped at the good work with their perfect ignorance of any existing coolness between any of the inhabitants of Cranford.

Ever since that day there has been the old friendly sociability in Cranford society; which I am thankful for, because of my dear Miss Matty's love of peace and kindliness. We all love Miss Matty, and I somehow think we are all of us better when she is near us.

CHRISTMAS STORMS AND SUNSHINE

In the town of —— (no matter where) there circulated two local newspapers (no matter when). Now the *Flying Post* was long-established and respectable—alias bigoted and Tory; the *Examiner* was spirited and intelligent—alias new-fangled and democratic. Every week these newspapers contained articles abusing each other, as cross and peppery as articles could be, and evidently the production of irritated minds, although they seemed to have one stereotyped commencement—"Though the article appearing in our last week's *Post* (or *Examiner*) is below contempt, yet we have been induced," &c. &c.; and every Saturday the Radical shopkeepers shook hands together, and agreed that the *Post* was done for by the slashing, clever *Examiner;* while the more dignified Tories began by regretting that Johnson should think that low paper, only read by a few of the vulgar, worth wasting his wit upon; however, the *Examiner* was at its last gasp.

It was not, though. It lived and flourished; at least it paid its way, as one of the heroes of my story could tell. He was chief compositor, or whatever title may be given to the headman of the mechanical part of a newspaper. He hardly confined himself to that department. Once or twice, unknown to the editor, when the manuscript had fallen short, he had filled up the vacant space by compositions of his own; announcements of a forthcoming crop of green peas in December; a grey thrush having been seen, or a white hare, or such interesting phenomena; invented for the occasion, I

must confess; but what of that? His wife always knew when to expect a little specimen of her husband's literary talent by a peculiar cough, which served as prelude; and, judging from this encouraging sign, and the high-pitched and emphatic voice in which he read them, she was inclined to think, that an "Ode to an early Rosebud," in the corner devoted to original poetry, and a letter in the correspondence department, signed "Pro Bono Publico," were her husband's writing, and to hold up her head accordingly.

I never could find out what it was that occasioned the Hodgsons to lodge in the same house as the Jenkinses. Jenkins held the same office in the Tory Paper as Hodgson did in the *Examiner*, and, as I said before, I leave you to give it a name. But Jenkins had a proper sense of his position, and a proper reverence for all in authority, from the king down to the editor and sub-editor. He would as soon have thought of borrowing the king's crown for a night-cap, or the king's sceptre for a walking-stick as he would have thought of filling up any spare corner with any production of his own; and I think it would have even added to his contempt of Hodgson (if that were possible), had he known of the "productions of his brain," as the latter fondly alluded to the paragraphs he inserted, when speaking to his wife.

Jenkins had his wife too. Wives were wanting to finish the completeness of the quarrel which existed one memorable Christmas week, some dozen years ago, between the two neighbours, the two compositors. And with wives, it was a very pretty, a very complete quarrel. To make the opposing parties still more equal, still more well-matched, if the Hodgsons had a baby ("such a baby!—a poor, puny little thing"), Mrs. Jenkins had a cat ("such a cat! a great, nasty, miowling tom-cat, that was always stealing the milk put by for little Angel's supper"). And now, having matched Greek with Greek, I must proceed to the tug of war. It was the day before Christmas; such a cold east wind! such an inky sky! such a blue-black look in people's faces, as

they were driven out more than usual, to complete their purchases for the next day's festival.

Before leaving home that morning, Jenkins had given some money to his wife to buy the next day's dinner.

"My dear, I wish for turkey and sausages. It may be a weakness, but I own I am partial to sausages. My deceased mother was. Such tastes are hereditary. As to the sweets —whether plum-pudding or mince-pies—I leave such considerations to you; I only beg you not to mind expense. Christmas comes but once a year."

And again he called out from the bottom of the first flight of stairs, just close to the Hodgsons' door ("such ostentatiousness," as Mrs. Hodgson observed), "You will not forget the sausages, my dear!"

"I should have liked to have had something above common, Mary," said Hodgson, as they too made their plans for the next day; "but I think roast beef must do for us. You see, love, we've a family."

"Only one, Jem! I don't want more than roast beef, though, I'm sure. Before I went to service, mother and me would have thought roast beef a very fine dinner."

"Well, let's settle it, then, roast beef and a plum-pudding; and now, good-bye. Mind and take care of little Tom. I thought he was a bit hoarse this morning."

And off he went to his work.

Now, it was a good while since Mrs. Jenkins and Mrs. Hodgson had spoken to each other, although they were quite as much in possession of the knowledge of events and opinions as though they did. Mary knew that Mrs. Jenkins despised her for not having a real lace cap, which Mrs. Jenkins had; and for having been a servant, which Mrs. Jenkins had not; and the little occasional pinchings which the Hodgsons were obliged to resort to, to make both ends meet, would have been very patiently endured by Mary, if she had not winced under Mrs. Jenkins's knowledge of such economy. But she had her revenge. She had a child, and Mrs. Jenkins had none. To have had a child, even such a

puny baby as little Tom, Mrs. Jenkins would have worn commonest caps, and cleaned grates, and drudged her fingers to the bone. The great unspoken disappointment of her life soured her temper, and turned her thoughts inward, and made her morbid and selfish.

"Hang that cat! he's been stealing again! he's gnawed the cold mutton in his nasty mouth till it's not fit to set before a Christian; and I've nothing else for Jem's dinner. But I'll give it him now I've caught him, that I will!"

So saying, Mary Hodgson caught up her husband's Sunday cane, and despite pussy's cries and scratches, she gave him such a beating as she hoped might cure him of his thievish propensities; when, lo! and behold, Mrs. Jenkins stood at the door with a face of bitter wrath.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, ma'am, to abuse a poor dumb animal, ma'am, as knows no better than to take food when he sees it, ma'am? He only follows the nature which God has given, ma'am; and it's a pity your nature, ma'am, which I've heard is of the stingy saving species, does not make you shut your cupboard door a little closer. There is such a thing as law for brute animals. I'll ask Mr. Jenkins, but I don't think them Radicals has done away with that law yet, for all their Reform Bill, ma'am. My poor precious love of a Tommy, is he hurt? and is his leg broke for taking a mouthful of scraps, as most people would give away to a beggar—if he'd take 'em!" wound up Mrs. Jenkins, casting a contemptuous look on the remnant of a scrag end of mutton.

Mary felt very angry and very guilty. For she really pitied the poor limping animal as he crept up to his mistress, and there lay down to bemoan himself; she wished she had not beaten him so hard, for it certainly was her own careless way of never shutting the cupboard-door that had tempted him to his fault. But the sneer at her little bit of mutton turned her penitence to fresh wrath, and she shut the door in Mrs. Jenkins's face, as she stood caressing her cat in the

lobby, with such a bang, that it wakened little Tom, and he began to cry.

Everything was to go wrong with Mary to-day. Now baby was awake, who was to take her husband's dinner to the office? She took the child in her arms and tried to hush him off to sleep again, and as she sung she cried, she could hardly tell why,—a sort of reaction from her violent angry feelings. She wished she had never beaten the poor cat; she wondered if his leg was really broken. What would her mother say if she knew how cross and cruel her little Mary was getting? If she should live to beat her child in one of her angry fits?

It was of no use lullabying while she sobbed so; it must be given up, and she must just carry her baby in her arms, and take him with her to the office, for it was long past dinner-time. So she pared the mutton carefully, although by so doing she reduced the meat to an infinitesimal quantity, and taking the baked potatoes out of the oven, she popped them piping hot into her basket, with the et-cæteras of plate, butter, salt, and knife and fork.

It was, indeed, a bitter wind. She bent against it as she ran, and the flakes of snow were sharp and cutting as ice. Baby cried all the way, though she cuddled him up in her shawl. Then her husband had made his appetite up for a potato-pie, and (literary man as he was) his body got so much the better of his mind, that he looked rather black at the cold mutton. Mary had no appetite for her own dinner when she arrived at home again. So, after she had tried to feed baby, and he had fretfully refused to take his bread and milk, she laid him down as usual on his quilt, surrounded by playthings, while she sided away, and chopped suet for the next day's pudding. Early in the afternoon a parcel came, done up first in brown paper, then in such a white, grass-bleached, sweet-smelling towel, and a note from her dear, dear mother; in which quaint writing she endeavoured to tell her daughter that she was not forgotten at Christmas time; but that, learning that Farmer Burton was killing his

pig, she had made interest for some of his famous pork, out of which she had manufactured some sausages, and flavoured them just as Mary used to like when she lived at home.

"Dear, dear mother!" said Mary to herself. "There never was any one like her for remembering other folk. What rare sausages she used to make! Home things have a smack with 'em no bought things can ever have. Set them up with their sausages! I've a notion if Mrs. Jenkins had ever tasted mother's she'd have no fancy for them town-made things Fanny took in just now."

And so she went on thinking about home, till the smiles and the dimples came out again at the remembrance of that pretty cottage, which would look green even now in the depth of winter, with its pyracanthus, and its holly-bushes, and the great Portugal laurel that was her mother's pride. And the back path through the orchard to Farmer Burton's, how well she remembered it! The bushels of unripe apples she had picked up there and distributed among his pigs, till he had scolded her for giving them so much green trash!

She was interrupted — her baby (I call him a baby, because his father and mother did, and because he was so little of his age, but I rather think he was eighteen months old,) had fallen asleep some time before among his play-things; an uneasy, restless sleep; but of which Mary had been thankful, as his morning's nap had been too short, and as she was so busy. But now he began to make such a strange crowing noise, just like a chair drawn heavily and gratingly along a kitchen-floor! His eyes were open, but expressive of nothing but pain.

"Mother's darling!" said Mary, in terror, lifting him up. "Baby, try not to make that noise. Hush, hush, darling; what hurts him?" But the noise came worse and worse.

"Fanny! Fanny!" Mary called in mortal fright, for her baby was almost black with his gasping breath, and she had no one to ask for aid or sympathy but her landlady's daughter, a little girl of twelve or thirteen, who attended to

the house in her mother's absence, as daily cook in gentlemen's families. Fanny was more especially considered the attendant of the upstairs lodgers (who paid for the use of the kitchen, "for Jenkins could not abide the smell of meat cooking"), but just now she was fortunately sitting at her afternoon's work of darning stockings, and hearing Mrs. Hodgson's cry of terror, she ran to her sitting-room, and understood the case at a glance.

"He's got the croup! O Mrs. Hodgson, he'll die as sure as fate. Little brother had it, and he died in no time. The doctor said he could do nothing for him—it had gone too far. He said if we'd put him in a warm bath at first, it might have saved him; but, bless you! he was never half so bad as your baby." Unconsciously there mingled in her statement some of a child's love of producing an effect; but the increasing danger was clear enough.

"Oh, my baby! my baby! Oh, love, love! don't look so ill! I cannot bear it. And my fire so low! There, I was thinking of home, and picking currants, and never minding the fire. O Fanny! what is the fire like in the kitchen? Speak."

"Mother told me to screw it up, and throw some slack on as soon as Mrs. Jenkins had done with it, and so I did. It's very low and black. But, oh, Mrs. Hodgson! let me run for the doctor—I cannot abear to hear him, it's so like little brother."

Through her streaming tears Mary motioned her to go; and trembling, sinking, sick at heart, she laid her boy in his cradle, and ran to fill her kettle.

Mrs. Jenkins, having cooked her husband's snug little dinner, to which he came home; having told him her story of pussy's beating, at which he was justly and dignifiedly (?) indignant, saying it was all of a piece with that abusive *Examiner;* having received the sausages, and turkey, and mince-pies, which her husband had ordered; and cleaned up the room, and prepared everything for tea, and coaxed and duly bemoaned her cat (who had pretty nearly forgotten his

beating, but very much enjoyed the petting); having done all these and many other things, Mrs. Jenkins sate down to get up the real lace cap. Every thread was pulled out separately, and carefully stretched: when—what was that? Outside, in the street, a chorus of piping children's voices sang the old carol she had heard a hundred times in the days of her youth—

> "As Joseph was a walking he heard an angel sing,
> 'This night shall be born our heavenly King.
> He neither shall be born in housen nor in hall,
> Nor in the place of Paradise, but in an ox's stall.
> He neither shall be clothed in purple nor in pall,
> But all in fair linen, as were babies all:
> He neither shall be rocked in silver nor in gold,
> But in a wooden cradle that rocks on the mould,'" &c.

She got up and went to the window. There, below, stood the group of black little figures, relieved against the snow, which now enveloped everything. "For old sake's sake," as she phrased it, she counted out a halfpenny apiece for the singers, out of the copper bag, and threw them down below.

The room had become chilly while she had been counting out and throwing down her money, so she stirred her already glowing fire, and sat down right before it—but not to stretch her lace; like Mary Hodgson, she began to think over long past days, on softening remembrances of the dead and gone, on words long forgotten, on holy stories heard at her mother's knee.

"I cannot think what's come over me to-night," said she, half aloud, recovering herself by the sound of her own voice from her train of thought—"My head goes wandering on them old times. I'm sure more texts have come into my head with thinking on my mother within this last half-hour, than I've thought on for years and years. I hope I'm not going to die. Folks says, thinking too much on the dead betokens we're going to join 'em; I should be loth to go just yet—such a fine turkey as we've got for dinner to-morrow too!"

Knock, knock, knock, at the door, as fast as knuckles could go. And then, as if the comer could not wait, the door was opened, and Mary Hodgson stood there as white as death.

"Mrs. Jenkins!—oh, your kettle is boiling, thank God! Let me have the water for my baby, for the love of God! He's got croup, and is dying!"

Mrs. Jenkins turned on her chair with a wooden, inflexible look on her face, that (between ourselves) her husband knew and dreaded for all his pompous dignity.

"I'm sorry I can't oblige you, ma'am; my kettle is wanted for my husband's tea. Don't be afeared, Tommy, Mrs. Hodgson won't venture to intrude herself where she's not desired. You'd better send for the doctor, ma'am, instead of wasting your time in wringing your hands, ma'am —my kettle is engaged."

Mary clasped her hands together with passionate force, but spoke no word of entreaty to that wooden face—that sharp, determined voice; but, as she turned away, she prayed for strength to bear the coming trial, and strength to forgive Mrs. Jenkins.

Mrs. Jenkins watched her go away meekly, as one who has no hope, and then she turned upon herself as sharply as she ever did on any one else.

"What a brute I am, Lord forgive me! What's my husband's tea to a baby's life? In croup, too, where time is everything. You crabbed old vixen, you!—any one may know you never had a child!"

She was downstairs (kettle in hand) before she had finished her self-upbraiding; and when in Mrs. Hodgson's room, she rejected all thanks (Mary had not the voice for many words), saying, stiffly, "I do it for the poor babby's sake, ma'am, hoping he may live to have mercy to poor dumb beasts, if he does forget to lock his cupboards."

But she did everything, and more than Mary, with her young inexperience, could have thought of. She prepared

the warm bath, and tried it with her husband's own thermometer (Mr. Jenkins was as punctual as clockwork in noting down the temperature of every day). She let his mother place her baby in the tub, still preserving the same rigid, affronted aspect, and then she went upstairs without a word. Mary longed to ask her to stay, but dared not; though, when she left the room, the tears chased each other down her cheeks faster than ever. Poor young mother! how she counted the minutes till the doctor should come. But, before he came, down again stalked Mrs. Jenkins, with something in her hand.

"I've seen many of these croup-fits, which, I take it, you've not, ma'am. Mustard plaisters is very sovereign, put on the throat; I've been up and made one, ma'am, and, by your leave, I'll put it on the poor little fellow."

Mary could not speak, but she signed her grateful assent.

It began to smart while they still kept silence; and he looked up to his mother as if seeking courage from her looks to bear the stinging pain; but she was softly crying to see him suffer, and her want of courage reacted upon him, and he began to sob aloud. Instantly Mrs. Jenkins's apron was up, hiding her face: "Peep-bo, baby," said she, as merrily as she could. His little face brightened, and his mother having once got the cue, the two women kept the little fellow amused, until his plaister had taken effect.

"He's better—oh, Mrs. Jenkins, look at his eyes! how different! And he breathes quite softly"——

As Mary spoke thus, the doctor entered. He examined his patient. Baby was really better.

"It has been a sharp attack, but the remedies you have applied have been worth all the Pharmacopœia an hour later.—I shall send a powder," &c. &c.

Mrs. Jenkins stayed to hear this opinion; and (her heart wonderfully more easy) was going to leave the room, when Mary seized her hand and kissed it; she could not speak her gratitude.

Mrs. Jenkins looked affronted and awkward, and as if she must go upstairs and wash her hand directly.

But, in spite of these sour looks, she came softly down an hour or so afterwards to see how baby was.

The little gentleman slept well after the fright he had given his friends; and on Christmas morning, when Mary awoke and looked at the sweet little pale face lying on her arm, she could hardly realise the danger he had been in.

When she came down (later than usual), she found the household in a commotion. What do you think had happened? Why, pussy had been traitor to his best friend, and eaten up some of Mr. Jenkins's own especial sausages; and gnawed and tumbled the rest so, that they were not fit to be eaten! There were no bounds to that cat's appetite! he would have eaten his own father if he had been tender enough. And now Mrs. Jenkins stormed and cried—"Hang the cat!"

Christmas Day, too! and all the shops shut! "What was turkey without sausages?" gruffly asked Mr. Jenkins.

"O Jem!" whispered Mary, "hearken what a piece of work he's making about sausages—I should like to take Mrs. Jenkins up some of mother's; they're twice as good as bought sausages."

"I see no objection, my dear. Sausages do not involve intimacies, else his politics are what I can no ways respect."

"But, oh, Jem, if you had seen her last night about baby! I'm sure she may scold me for ever, and I'll not answer. I'd even make her cat welcome to the sausages." The tears gathered to Mary's eyes as she kissed her boy.

"Better take 'em upstairs, my dear, and give them to the cat's mistress." And Jem chuckled at his saying.

Mary put them on a plate, but still she loitered.

"What must I say, Jem? I never know."

"Say—I hope you'll accept of these sausages, as my mother—no, that's not grammar;—say what comes uppermost, Mary, it will be sure to be right."

So Mary carried them upstairs and knocked at the door;

and when told to "come in," she looked very red, but went up to Mrs. Jenkins, saying, "Please take these. Mother made them." And was away before an answer could be given.

Just as Hodgson was ready to go to church, Mrs. Jenkins came downstairs, and called Fanny. In a minute, the latter entered the Hodgsons' room, and delivered Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins's compliments, and they would be particular glad if Mr. and Mrs. Hodgson would eat their dinner with them.

"And carry baby upstairs in a shawl, be sure," added Mrs. Jenkins's voice in the passage, close to the door, whither she had followed her messenger. There was no discussing the matter, with the certainty of every word being overheard.

Mary looked anxiously at her husband. She remembered his saying he did not approve of Mr. Jenkins's politics.

"Do you think it would do for baby?" asked he.

"Oh, yes," answered she eagerly; "I would wrap him up so warm."

"And I've got our room up to sixty-five already, for all it's so frosty," added the voice outside.

Now, how do you think they settled the matter? The very best way in the world. Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins came down into the Hodgsons' room and dined there. Turkey at the top, roast beef at the bottom, sausages at one side, potatoes at the other. Second course, plum-pudding at the top, and mince-pies at the bottom.

And after dinner, Mrs. Jenkins would have baby on her knee, and he seemed quite to take to her; she declared he was admiring the real lace on her cap, but Mary thought (though she did not say so) that he was pleased by her kind looks and coaxing words. Then he was wrapped up and carried carefully upstairs to tea, in Mrs. Jenkins's room. And after tea, Mrs. Jenkins, and Mary, and her husband, found out each other's mutual liking for music, and sat singing old glees and catches, till I don't know what o'clock, without one word of politics or newspapers.

Before they parted, Mary had coaxed pussy on to her knee; for Mrs. Jenkins would not part with baby, who was sleeping on her lap.

"When you're busy bring him to me. Do, now, it will be a real favour. I know you must have a deal to do, with another coming; let him come up to me. I'll take the greatest of cares of him; pretty darling, how sweet he looks when he's asleep!"

When the couples were once more alone, the husbands unburdened their minds to their wives.

Mr. Jenkins said to his—"Do you know, Burgess tried to make me believe Hodgson was such a fool as to put paragraphs into the *Examiner* now and then; but I see he knows his place, and has got too much sense to do any such thing."

Hodgson said—"Mary, love, I almost fancy from Jenkins's way of speaking (so much civiler than I expected), he guesses I wrote that 'Pro Bono' and the 'Rosebud,'—at any rate, I've no objection to your naming it, if the subject should come uppermost; I should like him to know I'm a literary man."

Well! I've ended my tale; I hope you don't think it too long; but, before I go, just let me say one thing.

If any of you have any quarrels, or misunderstandings, or coolnesses, or cold shoulders, or shynesses, or tiffs, or miffs, or huffs, with any one else, just make friends before Christmas,—you will be so much merrier if you do.

I ask it of you for the sake of that old angelic song, heard so many years ago by the shepherds, keeping watch by night, on Bethlehem Heights.

LIZZIE LEIGH

CHAPTER I

When Death is present in a household on a Christmas Day, the very contrast between the time as it now is, and the day as it has often been, gives a poignancy to sorrow—a more utter blankness to the desolation. James Leigh died just as the far-away bells of Rochdale Church were ringing for morning service on Christmas Day, 1836. A few minutes before his death, he opened his already glazing eyes, and made a sign to his wife, by the faint motion of his lips, that he had yet something to say. She stooped close down, and caught the broken whisper, "I forgive her, Annie! May God forgive me!"

"Oh, my love, my dear! only get well, and I will never cease showing my thanks for those words. May God in heaven bless thee for saying them. Thou'rt not so restless, my lad! may be—Oh, God!"

For even while she spoke he died.

They had been two-and-twenty years man and wife; for nineteen of those years their life had been as calm and happy as the most perfect uprightness on the one side, and the most complete confidence and loving submission on the other, could make it. Milton's famous line might have been framed and hung up as the rule of their married life, for he was truly the interpreter, who stood between God and her; she would have considered herself wicked if she had ever dared even to think him austere, though as certainly as he was an upright man, so surely was he hard, stern, and inflexible. But for three years the moan and the murmur

had never been out of her heart; she had rebelled against her husband as against a tyrant, with a hidden, sullen rebellion, which tore up the old landmarks of wifely duty and affection, and poisoned the fountains whence gentlest love and reverence had once been for ever springing.

But those last blessed words replaced him on his throne in her heart, and called out penitent anguish for all the bitter estrangement of later years. It was this which made her refuse all the entreaties of her sons, that she would see the kind-hearted neighbours, who called on their way from church, to sympathise and condole. No! she would stay with the dead husband that had spoken tenderly at last, if for three years he had kept silence; who knew but what, if she had only been more gentle and less angrily reserved he might have relented earlier—and in time?

She sat rocking herself to and fro by the side of the bed, while the footsteps below went in and out; she had been in sorrow too long to have any violent burst of deep grief now; the furrows were well worn in her cheeks, and the tears flowed quietly, if incessantly, all the day long. But when the winter's night drew on, and the neighbours had gone away to their homes, she stole to the window, and gazed out, long and wistfully, over the dark grey moors. She did not hear her son's voice, as he spoke to her from the door, nor his footstep as he drew nearer. She started when he touched her.

"Mother! come down to us. There's no one but Will and me. Dearest mother, we do so want you." The poor lad's voice trembled, and he began to cry. It appeared to require an effort on Mrs. Leigh's part to tear herself away from the window, but with a sigh she complied with his request.

The two boys (for though Will was nearly twenty-one, she still thought of him as a lad) had done everything in their power to make the house-place comfortable for her. She herself, in the old days before her sorrow, had never made a brighter fire or a cleaner hearth, ready for her

husband's return home, than now awaited her. The tea-things were all put out, and the kettle was boiling; and the boys had calmed their grief down into a kind of sober cheerfulness. They paid her every attention they could think of, but received little notice on her part; she did not resist, she rather submitted to all their arrangements; but they did not seem to touch her heart.

When tea was ended—it was merely the form of tea that had been gone through—Will moved the things away to the dresser. His mother leant back languidly in her chair.

"Mother, shall Tom read you a chapter? He's a better scholar than I."

"Ay, lad!" said she, almost eagerly. "That's it. Read me the Prodigal Son. Ay, ay, lad. Thank thee."

Tom found the chapter, and read it in the high-pitched voice which is customary in village schools. His mother bent forward, her lips parted, her eyes dilated; her whole body instinct with eager attention. Will sat with his head depressed and hung down. He knew why that chapter had been chosen; and to him it recalled the family's disgrace. When the reading was ended, he still hung down his head in gloomy silence. But her face was brighter than it had been before for the day. Her eyes looked dreamy, as if she saw a vision; and by-and-by she pulled the Bible towards her, and, putting her finger underneath each word, began to read them aloud in a low voice to herself; she read again the words of bitter sorrow and deep humiliation; but most of all, she paused and brightened over the father's tender reception of the repentant prodigal.

So passed the Christmas evening in the Upclose Farm.

The snow had fallen heavily over the dark waving moorland before the day of the funeral. The black storm-laden dome of heaven lay very still and close upon the white earth, as they carried the body forth out of the house which had known his presence so long as its ruling power. Two and two the mourners followed, making a black procession, in

their winding march over the unbeaten snow, to Milne Row Church; now lost in some hollow of the bleak moors, now slowly climbing the heaving ascents. There was no long tarrying after the funeral, for many of the neighbours who accompanied the body to the grave had far to go, and the great white flakes which came slowly down were the boding forerunners of a heavy storm. One old friend alone accompanied the widow and her sons to their home.

The Upclose Farm had belonged for generations to the Leighs; and yet its possession hardly raised them above the rank of labourers. There was the house and out-buildings, all of an old-fashioned kind, and about seven acres of barren unproductive land, which they had never possessed capital enough to improve; indeed, they could hardly rely upon it for subsistence; and it had been customary to bring up the sons to some trade, such as a wheelwright's or blacksmith's.

James Leigh had left a will in the possession of the old man who accompanied them home. He read it aloud. James had bequeathed the farm to his faithful wife, Anne Leigh, for her lifetime, and afterwards to his son William. The hundred and odd pounds in the savings bank was to accumulate for Thomas.

After the reading was ended, Anne Leigh sat silent for a time, and then she asked to speak to Samuel Orme alone. The sons went into the back kitchen, and thence strolled out into the fields regardless of the driving snow. The brothers were dearly fond of each other, although they were very different in character. Will, the elder, was like his father, stern, reserved and scrupulously upright. Tom (who was ten years younger) was gentle and delicate as a girl, both in appearance and character. He had always clung to his mother and dreaded his father. They did not speak as they walked, for they were only in the habit of talking about facts, and hardly knew the more sophisticated language applied to the description of feelings.

Meanwhile their mother had taken hold of Samuel Orme's arm with her trembling hand.

"Samuel, I must let the farm—I must."

"Let the farm! What's come o'er the woman?

"Oh, Samuel!" said she, her eyes swimming in tears, "I'm just fain to go and live in Manchester. I mun let the farm."

Samuel looked, and pondered, but did not speak for some time. At last he said—

"If thou hast made up thy mind, there's no speaking again it; and thou must e'en go. Thou'lt be sadly pottered wi' Manchester ways; but that's not my look-out. Why, thou'lt have to buy potatoes, a thing thou hast never done afore in all thy born life. Well! it's not my look-out. It's rather for me than again me. Our Jenny is going to be married to Tom Higginbotham, and he was speaking of wanting a bit of land to begin upon. His father will be dying sometime, I reckon, and then he'll step into the Croft Farm. But meanwhile"——

"Then, thou'lt let the farm," said she, still as eagerly as ever.

"Ay, ay; he'll take it fast enough, I've a notion. But I'll not drive a bargain with thee just now; it would not be right; we'll wait a bit."

"No; I cannot wait; settle it out at once."

"Well, well; I'll speak to Will about it. I see him out yonder. I'll step to him and talk it over."

Accordingly he went and joined the two lads, and, without more ado, began the subject to them.

"Will, thy mother is fain to go live in Manchester, and covets to let the farm. Now, I'm willing to take it for Tom Higginbotham; but I like to drive a keen bargain, and there would be no fun chaffering with thy mother just now. Let thee and me buckle to, my lad! and try and cheat each other; it will warm us this cold day."

"Let the farm!" said both the lads at once, with infinite surprise. "Go live in Manchester!"

When Samuel Orme found that the plan had never before been named to either Will or Tom, he would have

nothing to do with it, he said, until they had spoken to their mother. Likely she was "dazed" by her husband's death; he would wait a day or two, and not name it to any one; not to Tom Higginbotham himself, or may be he would set his heart upon it. The lads had better go in and talk it over with their mother. He bade them good day, and left them.

Will looked very gloomy, but he did not speak till they got near the house. Then he said—

"Tom, go to th' shippon, and supper the cows. I want to speak to mother alone."

When he entered the house-place, she was sitting before the fire, looking into its embers. She did not hear him come in: for some time she had lost her quick perception of outward things.

"Mother! what's this about going to Manchester?" asked he.

"Oh, lad!" said she, turning round, and speaking in a beseeching tone, "I must go and seek our Lizzie. I cannot rest here for thinking on her. Many's the time I've left thy father sleeping in bed, and stole to th' window, and looked and looked my heart out towards Manchester, till I thought I must just set out and tramp over moor and moss straight away till I got there, and then lift up every downcast face till I came to our Lizzie. And often, when the south wind was blowing soft among the hollows, I've fancied (it could but be fancy, thou knowest) I heard her crying upon me; and I've thought the voice came closer and closer, till at last it was sobbing out, 'Mother!' close to the door; and I've stolen down, and undone the latch before now, and looked out into the still, black night, thinking to see her—and turned sick and sorrowful when I heard no living sound but the sough of the wind dying away. Oh, speak not to me of stopping here, when she may be perishing for hunger, like the poor lad in the parable." And now she lifted up her voice, and wept aloud.

Will was deeply grieved. He had been old enough to be told the family shame when, more than two years before, his

father had had his letter to his daughter returned by her mistress in Manchester, telling him that Lizzie had left her service some time—and why. He had sympathized with his father's stern anger; though he had thought him something hard, it is true, when he had forbidden his weeping, heart-broken wife to go and try to find her poor sinning child, and declared that henceforth they would have no daughter; that she should be as one dead, and her name never more be named at market or at meal time, in blessing or in prayer. He had held his peace, with compressed lips and contracted brow, when the neighbours had noticed to him how poor Lizzie's death had aged both his father and his mother; and how they thought the bereaved couple would never hold up their heads again. He himself had felt as if that one event had made him old before his time; and had envied Tom the tears he had shed over poor, pretty, innocent, dead Lizzie. He thought about her sometimes, till he ground his teeth together, and could have struck her down in her shame. His mother had never named her to him until now.

"Mother!" said he, at last. "She may be dead. Most likely she is."

"No, Will; she is not dead," said Mrs. Leigh. "God will not let her die till I've seen her once again. Thou dost not know how I've prayed and prayed just once again to see her sweet face, and tell her I've forgiven her, though she's broken my heart—she has, Will." She could not go on for a minute or two for the choking sobs. "Thou dost not know that, or thou wouldst not say she could be dead—for God is very merciful, Will; He is; He is much more pitiful than man. I could never ha' spoken to thy father as I did to Him—and yet thy father forgave her at last. The last words he said were that he forgave her. Thou'lt not be harder than thy father, Will? Do not try and hinder me going to seek her, for it's no use."

Will sat very still for a long time before he spoke. At last he said, "I'll not hinder you. I think she's dead, but that's no matter."

"She's not dead," said her mother, with low earnestness. Will took no notice of the interruption.

"We will all go to Manchester for a twelvemonth, and let the farm to Tom Higginbotham. I'll get blacksmith's work; and Tom can have good schooling for awhile, which he's always craving for. At the end of the year you'll come back, mother, and give over fretting for Lizzie, and think with me that she is dead—and, to my mind, that would be more comfort than to think of her living;" he dropped his voice as he spoke these last words. She shook her head, but made no answer. He asked again—

"Will you, mother, agree to this?"

"I'll agree to it a-this-ns," said she. "If I hear and see nought of her for a twelvemonth, me being in Manchester looking out, I'll just ha' broken my heart fairly before the year's ended, and then I shall know neither love nor sorrow for her any more, when I'm at rest in my grave. I'll agree to that, Will."

"Well, I suppose it must be so. I shall not tell Tom, mother, why we're flitting to Manchester. Best spare him."

"As thou wilt," said she sadly; "so that we go, that's all."

Before the wild daffodils were in flower in the sheltered copses round Upclose Farm, the Leighs were settled in their Manchester home; if they could ever grow to consider that place as a home, where there was no garden or out-building, no fresh breezy outlet, no far-stretching view, over moor and hollow; no dumb animals to be tended, and, what more than all they missed, no old haunting memories, even though those remembrances told of sorrow, and the dead and gone.

Mrs. Leigh heeded the loss of all these things less than her sons. She had more spirit in her countenance than she had had for months, because now she had hope; of a sad enough kind, to be sure, but still it was hope. She performed all her household duties, strange and complicated as they were, and bewildered as she was with all the town necessities of her new manner of life; but when her house was "sided," and the boys come home from their work in the evening, she

would put on her things and steal out, unnoticed, as she thought, but not without many a heavy sigh from Will, after she had closed the house-door and departed. It was often past midnight before she came back, pale and weary, with almost a guilty look upon her face; but that face so full of disappointment and hope deferred, that Will had never the heart to say what he thought of the folly and hopelessness of the search. Night after night it was renewed, till days grew to weeks, and weeks to months. All this time Will did his duty towards her as well as he could, without having sympathy with her. He stayed at home in the evenings for Tom's sake, and often wished he had Tom's pleasure in reading, for the time hung heavy on his hands as he sat up for his mother.

I need not tell you how the mother spent the weary hours. And yet I will tell you something. She used to wander out, at first as if without a purpose, till she rallied her thoughts, and brought all her energies to bear on the one point; then she went with earnest patience along the least-known ways to some new part of the town, looking wistfully with dumb entreaty into people's faces; sometimes catching a glimpse of a figure which had a kind of momentary likeness to her child's, and following that figure with never-wearying perseverance, till some light from shop or lamp showed the cold strange face which was not her daughter's. Once or twice a kind-hearted passer-by, struck by her look of yearning woe, turned back and offered help, or asked her what she wanted. When so spoken to, she answered only, "You don't know a poor girl they call Lizzie Leigh, do you?" and when they denied all knowledge, she shook her head, and went on again. I think they believed her to be crazy. But she never spoke first to any one. She sometimes took a few minutes' rest on the door-steps, and sometimes (very seldom) covered her face and cried; but she could not afford to lose time and chances in this way; while her eyes were blinded with tears, the lost one might pass by unseen.

One evening, in the rich time of shortening autumn days, Will saw an old man, who, without being absolutely drunk, could not guide himself rightly along the foot-path, and was mocked for his unsteadiness of gait by the idle boys of the neighbourhood. For his father's sake, Will regarded old age with tenderness, even when most degraded and removed from the stern virtues which dignified that father; so he took the old man home, and seemed to believe his often-repeated assertions, that he drank nothing but water. The stranger tried to stiffen himself up into steadiness as he drew nearer home, as if there was some one there for whose respect he cared even in his half-intoxicated state, or whose feelings he feared to grieve. His home was exquisitely clean and neat, even in outside appearance; threshold, window, and window-sill were outward signs of some spirit of purity within. Will was rewarded for his attention by a bright glance of thanks, succeeded by a blush of shame, from a young woman of twenty or thereabouts. She did not speak or second her father's hospitable invitations to him to be seated. She seemed unwilling that a stranger should witness her father's attempts at stately sobriety, and Will could not bear to stay and see her distress. But when the old man, with many a flabby shake of the hand, kept asking him to come again some other evening, and see them, Will sought her downcast eyes, and, though he could not read their veiled meaning, he answered timidly, "If it's agreeable to everybody, I'll come, and thank ye." But there was no answer from the girl, to whom this speech was in reality addressed; and Will left the house, liking her all the better for never speaking.

He thought about her a great deal for the next day or two; he scolded himself for being so foolish as to think of her, and then fell to with fresh vigour, and thought of her more than ever. He tried to depreciate her: he told himself she was not pretty, and then made indignant answer that he liked her looks much better than any beauty of them all. He wished he was not so country-looking, so red-faced, so

broad-shouldered; while she was like a lady, with her smooth, colourless complexion, her bright dark hair, and her spotless dress. Pretty or not pretty, she drew his footsteps towards her; he could not resist the impulse that made him wish to see her once more, and find out some fault which should unloose his heart from her unconscious keeping. But there she was, pure and maidenly as before. He sat and looked, answering her father at cross-purposes, while she drew more and more into the shadow of the chimney-corner out of sight. Then the spirit that possessed him (it was not he himself, sure, that did so impudent a thing!) made him get up and carry the candle to a different place, under the pretence of giving her more light at her sewing, but in reality to be able to see her better. She could not stand this much longer, but jumped up and said she must put her little niece to bed; and surely there never was, before or since, so troublesome a child of two years old, for though Will stayed an hour and a half longer, she never came down again. He won the father's heart, though, by his capacity as a listener; for some people are not at all particular, and, so that they themselves may talk on undisturbed, are not so unreasonable as to expect attention to what they say.

Will did gather this much, however, from the old man's talk. He had once been quite in a genteel line of business, but had failed for more money than any greengrocer he had heard of; at least, any who did not mix up fish and game with greengrocery proper. This grand failure seemed to have been the event of his life, and one on which he dwelt with a strange kind of pride. It appeared as if at present he rested from his past exertions (in the bankrupt line), and depended on his daughter, who kept a small school for very young children. But all these particulars Will only remembered and understood when he had left the house; at the time he heard them, he was thinking of Susan. After he had made good his footing at Mr. Palmer's, he was not long, you may be sure, without finding some reason for returning again and again. He listened to her father, he

talked to the little niece, but he looked at Susan, both while he listened and while he talked. Her father kept on insisting upon his former gentility, the details of which would have appeared very questionable to Will's mind, if the sweet, delicate, modest Susan had not thrown an inexplicable air of refinement over all she came near. She never spoke much; she was generally diligently at work; but when she moved it was so noiselessly, and when she did speak, it was in so low and soft a voice, that silence, speech, motion, and stillness alike seemed to remove her high above Will's reach into some saintly and inaccessible air of glory—high above his reach, even as she knew him! And, if she were made acquainted with the dark secret behind of his sister's shame, which was kept ever present to his mind by his mother's nightly search among the outcast and forsaken, would not Susan shrink away from him with loathing, as if he were tainted by the involuntary relationship? This was his dread; and thereupon followed a resolution that he would withdraw from her sweet company before it was too late. So he resisted internal temptation, and stayed at home, and suffered and sighed. He became angry with his mother for her untiring patience in seeking for one who, he could not help hoping, was dead rather than alive. He spoke sharply to her, and received only such sad deprecatory answers as made him reproach himself, and still more lose sight of peace of mind. This struggle could not last long without affecting his health; and Tom, his sole companion through the long evenings, noticed his increasing languor, his restless irritability, with perplexed anxiety, and at last resolved to call his mother's attention to his brother's haggard, careworn looks. She listened with a startled recollection of Will's claims upon her love. She noticed his decreasing appetite and half-checked sighs.

"Will, lad! what's come o'er thee?" said she to him, as he sat listlessly gazing into the fire.

"There's nought the matter with me," said he, as if annoyed at her remark.

"Nay, lad, but there is." He did not speak again to contradict her; indeed, she did not know if he had heard her, so unmoved did he look.

"Wouldst like to go to Upclose Farm?" asked she sorrowfully.

"It's just blackberrying time," said Tom.

Will shook his head. She looked at him awhile, as if trying to read that expression of despondency, and trace it back to its source.

"Will and Tom could go," said she; "I must stay here till I've found her, thou knowest," continued she, dropping her voice.

He turned quickly round, and with the authority he at all times exercised over Tom, bade him begone to bed.

When Tom had left the room, he prepared to speak.

CHAPTER II

"Mother," then said Will, "why will you keep on thinking she's alive? If she were but dead, we need never name her name again. We've never heard nought on her since father wrote her that letter; we never knew whether she got it or not. She'd left her place before then. Many a one dies in"——

"Oh, my lad! dunnot speak so to me, or my heart will break outright," said his mother, with a sort of cry. Then she calmed herself, for she yearned to persuade him to her own belief. "Thou never asked, and thou'rt too like thy father for me to tell without asking—but it were all to be near Lizzie's old place that I settled down on this side o' Manchester; and the very day at after we came, I went to her old missus, and asked to speak a word wi her. I had a strong mind to cast it up to her, that she should ha' sent

my poor lass away, without telling on it to us first; but she were in black, and looked so sad I could na' find in my heart to threep it up. But I did ask her a bit about our Lizzie. The master would have turned her away at a day's warning (he's gone to t'other place; I hope he'll meet wi' more mercy there than he showed our Lizzie—I do), and when the missus asked her should she write to us, she says Lizzie shook her head; and when she speered at her again, the poor lass went down on her knees, and begged her not, for she said it would break my heart (as it has done, Will—God knows it has)," said the poor mother, choking with her struggle to keep down her hard overmastering grief, "and her father would curse her—Oh, God, teach me to be patient." She could not speak for a few minutes—"and the lass threatened, and said she'd go drown herself in the canal, if the missus wrote home—and so——

"Well! I'd got a trace of my child—the missus thought she'd gone to the workhouse to be nursed; and there I went—and there, sure enough, she had been—and they'd turned her out as she were strong, and told her she were young enough to work—but whatten kind o' work would be open to her, lad, and her baby to keep?"

Will listened to his mother's tale with deep sympathy, not unmixed with the old bitter shame. But the opening of her heart had unlocked his, and after a while he spoke—

"Mother! I think I'd e'en better go home. Tom can stay wi' thee. I know I should stay too, but I cannot stay in peace so near—her—without craving to see her—Susan Palmer, I mean."

"Has the old Mr. Palmer thou telled me on a daughter?" asked Mrs. Leigh.

"Ay, he has. And I love her above a bit. And it's because I love her I want to leave Manchester. That's all."

Mrs. Leigh tried to understand this speech for some time, but found it difficult of interpretation.

"Why shouldst thou not tell her thou lov'st her? Thou'rt a likely lad, and sure o' work. Thou'lt have Upclose at my

death; and as for that, I could let thee have it now, and keep mysel' by doing a bit of charing. It seems to me a very backwards sort o' way of winning her to think of leaving Manchester."

"Oh, mother, she's so gentle and so good—she's downright holy. She's never known a touch of sin; and can I ask her to marry me, knowing what we do about Lizzie, and fearing worse? I doubt if one like her could ever care for me; but if she knew about my sister, it would put a gulf between us, and she'd shudder up at the thought of crossing it. You don't know how good she is, mother!"

"Will, Will! if she's so good as thou say'st, she'll have pity on such as my Lizzie. If she has no pity for such, she's a cruel Pharisee, and thou'rt best without her."

But he only shook his head and sighed; and for the time the conversation dropped.

But a new idea sprang up in Mrs. Leigh's head. She thought that she would go and see Susan Palmer, and speak up for Will, and tell her the truth about Lizzie; and according to her pity for the poor sinner, would she be worthy or unworthy of him. She resolved to go the very next afternoon, but without telling any one of her plan. Accordingly she looked out the Sunday clothes she had never before had the heart to unpack since she came to Manchester, but which she now desired to appear in, in order to do credit to Will. She put on her old-fashioned black mode bonnet, trimmed with real lace; her scarlet cloth cloak, which she had had ever since she was married; and, always spotlessly clean, she set forth on her unauthorised embassy. She knew the Palmers lived in Crown Street, though where she had heard it she could not tell; and modestly asking her way, she arrived in the street about a quarter to four o'clock. She stopped to inquire the exact number, and the woman whom she addressed told her that Susan Palmer's school would not be loosed till four, and asked her to step in and wait until then at her house.

"For," said she, smiling, "them that wants Susan

Palmer wants a kind friend of ours; so we, in a manner, call cousins. Sit down, missus, sit down. I'll wipe the chair, so that it shanna dirty your cloak. My mother used to wear them bright cloaks, and they're right gradely things again a green field."

"Han ye known Susan Palmer long?" asked Mrs. Leigh, pleased with the admiration of her cloak.

"Ever since they comed to live in our street. Our Sally goes to her school."

"Whatten sort of a lass is she, for I ha' never seen her?"

"Well, as for looks, I cannot say. It's so long since I first knowed her, that I've clean forgotten what I thought of her then. My master says he never saw such a smile for gladdening the heart. But may be it's not looks you're asking about. The best thing I can say of her looks is, that she's just one a stranger would stop in the street to ask help from if he needed it. All the little childer creeps as close as they can to her; she'll have as many as three or four hanging to her apron all at once."

"Is she cocket at all?"

"Cocket, bless you! you never saw a creature less set up in all your life. Her father's cocket enough. No! she's not cocket any way. You've not heard much of Susan Palmer, I reckon, if you think she's cocket. She's just one to come quietly in, and do the very thing most wanted; little things, may be, that any one could do, but that few would think on, for another. She'll bring her thimble wi' her, and mend up after the childer o' nights; and she writes all Betty Harker's letters to her grandchild out at service; and she's in nobody's way, and that's a great matter, I take it. Here's the childer running past! School is loosed. You'll find her now, missus, ready to hear and to help. But we none on us frab her by going near her in school-time."

Poor Mrs. Leigh's heart began to beat, and she could almost have turned round and gone home again. Her country breeding had made her shy of strangers, and this

Susan Palmer appeared to her like a real born lady by all accounts. So she knocked with a timid feeling at the indicated door, and when it was opened, dropped a simple curtsey without speaking. Susan had her little niece in her arms, curled up with fond endearment against her breast; but she put her gently down to the ground, and instantly placed a chair in the best corner of the room for Mrs. Leigh, when she told her who she was. "It's not Will as has asked me to come," said the mother apologetically; "I'd a wish just to speak to you myself!"

Susan coloured up to her temples, and stooped to pick up the little toddling girl. In a minute or two Mrs. Leigh began again.

"Will thinks you would na respect us if you knew all; but I think you could na help feeling for us in the sorrow God has put upon us; so I just put on my bonnet, and came off unknownst to the lads. Every one says you're very good, and that the Lord has keeped you from falling from His ways; but may be you've never yet been tried and tempted as some is. I'm perhaps speaking too plain, but my heart's welly broken, and I can't be choice in my words as them who are happy can. Well now! I'll tell you the truth. Will dreads you to hear it, but I'll just tell it you. You mun know"—— but here the poor woman's words failed her, and she could do nothing but sit rocking herself backwards and forwards, with sad eyes, straight gazing into Susan's face, as if they tried to tell the tale of agony which the quivering lips refused to utter. Those wretched, stony eyes forced the tears down Susan's cheeks, and, as if this sympathy gave the mother strength, she went on in a low voice—"I had a daughter once, my heart's darling. Her father thought I made too much on her, and that she'd grow marred staying at home; so he said she mun go among strangers and learn to rough it. She were young, and liked the thought of seeing a bit of the world; and her father heard on a place in Manchester. Well! I'll not weary you. That poor girl were led astray; and first thing we heard on it, was when

a letter of her father's was sent back by her missus, saying she'd left her place, or, to speak right, the master had turned her into the street soon as he had heard of her condition—and she not seventeen!"

She now cried aloud; and Susan wept too. The little child looked up into their faces, and, catching their sorrow, began to whimper and wail. Susan took it softly up, and hiding her face in its little neck, tried to restrain her tears, and think of comfort for the mother. At last she said—

"Where is she now?"

"Lass! I dunnot know," said Mrs. Leigh, checking her sobs to communicate this addition to her distress. "Mrs. Lomax telled me she went"——

"Mrs. Lomax—what Mrs. Lomax?"

"Her as lives in Brabazon Street. She telled me my poor wench went to the workhouse fra there. I'll not speak again the dead; but if her father would but ha' letten me—but he were one who had no notion—no, I'll not say that; best say nought. He forgave her on his death-bed. I dare say I did na go th' right way to work."

"Will you hold the child for me one instant?" said Susan.

"Ay, if it will come to me. Childer used to be fond on me till I got the sad look on my face that scares them, I think."

But the little girl clung to Susan; so she carried it upstairs with her. Mrs. Leigh sat by herself—how long she did not know.

Susan came down with a bundle of far-worn baby clothes.

"You must listen to me a bit, and not think too much about what I'm going to tell you. Nanny is not my niece, nor any kin to me, that I know of. I used to go out working by the day. One night as I came home, I thought some woman was following me; I turned to look. The woman, before I could see her face (for she turned it to one side), offered me something. I held out my arms by instinct;

she dropped a bundle into them, with a bursting sob that went straight to my heart. It was a baby. I looked round again; but the woman was gone. She had run away as quick as lightning. There was a little packet of clothes—very few—and as if they were made out of its mother's gowns, for they were large patterns to buy for a baby. I was always fond of babies; and I had not my wits about me, father says; for it was very cold, and when I'd seen as well as I could (for it was past ten) that there was no one in the street, I brought it in and warmed it. Father was very angry when he came, and said he'd take it to the workhouse the next morning, and flyted me sadly about it. But when morning came I could not bear to part with it; it had slept in my arms all night; and I've heard what workhouse bringing-up is. So I told father I'd give up going out working, and stay at home and keep school, if I might only keep the baby; and, after a while, he said if I earned enough for him to have his comforts, he'd let me; but he's never taken to her. Now, don't tremble so—I've but a little more to tell—and may be I'm wrong in telling it; but I used to work next door to Mrs. Lomax's, in Brabazon Street, and the servants were all thick together; and I heard about Bessy (they called her) being sent away. I don't know that ever I saw her; but the time would be about fitting to this child's age, and I've sometimes fancied it was hers. And now, will you look at the little clothes that came with her—bless her!"

But Mrs. Leigh had fainted. The strange joy and shame, and gushing love for the little child, had overpowered her; it was some time before Susan could bring her round. There she was all trembling, sick with impatience to look at the little frocks. Among them was a slip of paper which Susan had forgotten to name, that had been pinned to the bundle. On it was scrawled, in a round, stiff hand—

"Call her Anne. She does not cry much, and takes a deal of notice. God bless you, and forgive me."

The writing was no clue at all; the name "Anne,"

common though it was, seemed something to build upon. But Mrs. Leigh recognized one of the frocks instantly, as being made out of a part of a gown that she and her daughter had bought together in Rochdale.

She stood up, and stretched out her hands in the attitude of blessing over Susan's bent head.

"God bless you, and show you His mercy in your need, as you have shown it to this little child."

She took the little creature in her arms, and smoothed away her sad looks to a smile, and kissed it fondly, saying over and over again, "Nanny, Nanny, my little Nanny." At last the child was soothed, and looked in her face and smiled back again.

"It has her eyes," said she to Susan.

"I never saw her to the best of my knowledge. I think it must be hers by the frock. But where can she be?"

"God knows," said Mrs. Leigh; "I dare not think she's dead. I'm sure she isn't."

"No; she's not dead. Every now and then a little packet is thrust in under our door, with, may be, two half-crowns in it; once it was half-a-sovereign. Altogether I've got seven-and-thirty shillings wrapped up for Nanny. I never touch it, but I've often thought the poor mother feels near to God when she brings this money. Father wanted to set the policeman to watch, but I said No; for I was afraid if she was watched she might not come, and it seemed such a holy thing to be checking her in, I could not find in my heart to do it."

"Oh, if we could but find her! I'd take her in my arms, and we'd just lie down and die together."

"Nay, don't speak so!" said Susan gently; "for all that's come and gone, she may turn right at last. Mary Magdalen did, you know."

"Eh! but I were nearer right about thee than Will. He thought you would never look on him again if you knew about Lizzie. But thou'rt not a Pharisee."

"I'm sorry he thought I could be so hard," said Susan,

in a low voice, and colouring up. Then Mrs. Leigh was alarmed, and, in her motherly anxiety, she began to fear lest she had injured Will in Susan's estimation.

"You see Will thinks so much of you—gold would not be good enough for you to walk on, in his eye. He said you'd never look at him as he was, let alone his being brother to my poor wench. He loves you so, it makes him think meanly on everything belonging to himself, as not fit to come near ye; but he's a good lad, and a good son. Thou'lt be a happy woman if thou'lt have him, so don't let my words go against him—don't!"

But Susan hung her head, and made no answer. She had not known until now that Will thought so earnestly and seriously about her; and even now she felt afraid that Mrs. Leigh's words promised her too much happiness, and that they could not be true. At any rate, the instinct of modesty made her shrink from saying anything which might seem like a confession of her own feelings to a third person. Accordingly she turned the conversation on the child.

"I am sure he could not help loving Nanny," said she. "There never was such a good little darling; don't you think she'd win his heart if he knew she was his niece, and perhaps bring him to think kindly on his sister?"

"I dunnot know," said Mrs. Leigh, shaking her head. "He has a turn in his eye like his father, that makes me—— He's right down good though. But, you see, I've never been a good one at managing folk; one severe look turns me sick, and then I say just the wrong thing, I'm so fluttered. Now I should like nothing better than to take Nancy home with me; but Tom knows nothing but that his sister is dead, and I've not the knack of speaking rightly to Will. I dare not do it, and that's the truth. But you mun not think badly of Will. He's so good hissel, that he can't understand how any one can do wrong; and, above all, I'm sure he loves you dearly."

"I don't think I could part with Nancy," said Susan, anxious to stop this revelation of Will's attachment to

herself. "He'll come round to her soon; he can't fail; and I'll keep a sharp look-out after the poor mother, and try and catch her the next time she comes with her little parcels of money."

"Ay, lass; we mun get hold of her; my Lizzie. I love thee dearly for thy kindness to her child; but if thou canst catch her for me, I'll pray for thee when I'm too near my death to speak words; and, while I live, I'll serve thee next to her—she mun come first, thou know'st. God bless thee, lass. My heart is lighter by a deal than it was when I comed in. Them lads will be looking for me home, and I mun go, and leave this little sweet one" (kissing it). "If I can take courage, I'll tell Will all that has come and gone between us two. He may come and see thee, mayn't he?"

"Father will be very glad to see him, I'm sure," replied Susan. The way in which this was spoken satisfied Mrs. Leigh's anxious heart that she had done Will no harm by what she had said; and, with many a kiss to the little one, and one more fervent tearful blessing on Susan, she went homewards.

CHAPTER III

That night Mrs. Leigh stopped at home—that only night for many months. Even Tom, the scholar, looked up from his books in amazement; but then he remembered that Will had not been well, and that, his mother's attention having been called to the circumstance, it was only natural she should stay to watch him. And no watching could be more tender, or more complete. Her loving eyes seemed never averted from his face—his grave, sad, careworn face. When Tom went to bed the mother left her seat, and going up to Will, where he sat looking at the fire, but not seeing it, she kissed his forehead, and said—

"Will! lad, I've been to see Susan Palmer!"

She felt the start under her hand which was placed on his shoulder, but he was silent for a minute or two. Then he said—

"What took you there, mother?"

"Why, my lad, it was likely I should wish to see one you cared for; I did not put myself forward. I put on my Sunday clothes, and tried to behave as yo'd ha' liked me. At least, I remember trying at first; but after, I forgot all."

She rather wished that he would question her as to what made her forget all. But he only said—

"How was she looking, mother?"

"Well, thou seest I never set eyes on her before; but she's a good, gentle-looking creature; and I love her dearly, as I've reason to."

Will looked up with momentary surprise, for his mother was too shy to be usually taken with strangers. But, after all, it was natural in this case, for who could look at Susan without loving her? So still he did not ask any questions, and his poor mother had to take courage, and try again to introduce the subject near to her heart. But how?

"Will!" said she (jerking it out in sudden despair of her own powers to lead to what she wanted to say), "I telled her all."

"Mother! you've ruined me," said he, standing up, and standing opposite to her with a stern white look of affright on his face.

"No! my own dear lad; dunnot look so scared; I have not ruined you!" she exclaimed, placing her two hands on his shoulders, and looking fondly into his face. "She's not one to harden her heart against a mother's sorrow. My own lad, she's too good for that. She's not one to judge and scorn the sinner. She's too deep read in her New Testament for that. Take courage, Will; and thou may'st, for I watched her well, though it is not for one woman to let out another's secret. Sit thee down, lad, for thou look'st very white."

He sat down. His mother drew a stool towards him, and sat at his feet.

"Did you tell her about Lizzie, then?" asked he, hoarse and low.

"I did; I telled her all! and she fell a-crying over my deep sorrow, and the poor wench's sin. And then a light comed into her face, trembling and quivering with some new glad thought; and what dost thou think it was, Will, lad? Nay, I'll not misdoubt but that thy heart will give thanks as mine did, afore God and His angels, for her great goodness. That little Nanny is not her niece, she's our Lizzie's own child, my little grandchild." She could no longer restrain her tears; and they fell hot and fast, but still she looked into his face.

"Did she know it was Lizzie's child? I do not comprehend," said he, flushing red.

"She knows now; she did not at first, but took the little helpless creature in, out of her own pitiful, loving heart, guessing only that it was the child of shame; and she's worked for it, and kept it, and tended it ever sin' it were a mere baby, and loves it fondly. Will! won't you love it?" asked she beseechingly.

He was silent for an instant; then he said, "Mother, I'll try. Give me time, for all these things startle me. To think of Susan having to do with such a child!"

"Ay, Will! and to think, as may be yet, of Susan having to do with the child's mother! For she is tender and pitiful, and speaks hopefully of my lost one, and will try and find her for me, when she comes, as she does sometimes, to thrust money under the door, for her baby. Think of that, Will. Here's Susan, good and pure as the angels in heaven, yet, like them, full of hope and mercy, and one who, like them, will rejoice over her as repents. Will, my lad, I'm not afeard of you now; and I must speak, and you must listen. I am your mother, and I dare to command you, because I know I am in the right, and that God is on my side. If He should lead the poor wandering lassie to Susan's door, and

she comes back, crying and sorrowful, led by that good angel to us once more, thou shalt never say a casting-up word to her about her sin, but be tender and helpful towards one 'who was lost and is found,' so may God's blessing rest on thee, and so may'st thou lead Susan home as thy wife."

She stood no longer as the meek, imploring, gentle mother, but firm and dignified, as if the interpreter of God's will. Her manner was so unusual and solemn, that it overcame all Will's pride and stubbornness. He rose softly while she was speaking, and bent his head, as if in reverence at her words, and the solemn injunction which they conveyed. When she had spoken, he said, in so subdued a voice that she was almost surprised at the sound, "Mother, I will."

"I may be dead and gone; but, all the same, thou wilt take home the wandering sinner, and heal up her sorrows, and lead her to her Father's house. My lad, I can speak no more; I'm turned very faint."

He placed her in a chair; he ran for water. She opened her eyes, and smiled.

"God bless you, Will. Oh! I am so happy. It seems as if she were found; my heart is so filled with gladness."

That night Mr. Palmer stayed out late and long. Susan was afraid that he was at his old haunts and habits—getting tipsy at some public-house; and this thought oppressed her, even though she had so much to make her happy in the consciousness that Will loved her. She sat up long, and then she went to bed, leaving all arranged as well as she could for her father's return. She looked at the little rosy, sleeping girl who was her bed-fellow, with redoubled tenderness, and with many a prayerful thought. The little arms entwined her neck as she lay down, for Nanny was a light sleeper, and was conscious that she, who was loved with all the power of that sweet, childish heart, was near her, and by her, although she was too sleepy to utter any of her half-formed words.

And, by-and-by, she heard her father come home,

stumbling uncertain, trying first the windows, and next the door-fastenings, with many a loud incoherent murmur. The little innocent twined around her seemed all the sweeter and more lovely, when she thought sadly of her erring father. And presently he called aloud for a light. She had left matches and all arranged as usual on the dresser; but, fearful of some accident from fire, in his unusually intoxicated state, she now got up softly, and putting on a cloak, went down to his assistance.

Alas! the little arms that were unclosed from her soft neck belonged to a light, easily-awakened sleeper. Nanny missed her darling Susy; and terrified at being left alone, in the vast mysterious darkness, which had no bounds and seemed infinite, she slipped out of bed, and tottered, in her little nightgown, towards the door. There was a light below, and there was Susy and safety! So she went onwards two steps towards the steep, abrupt stairs; and then, dazzled by sleepiness, she stood, she wavered, she fell! Down on her head on the stone floor she fell! Susan flew to her, and spoke all soft, entreating, loving words; but her white lids covered up the blue violets of eyes, and there was no murmur came out of the pale lips. The warm tears that rained down did not awaken her; she lay stiff, and weary with her short life, on Susan's knee. Susan went sick with terror. She carried her upstairs, and laid her tenderly in bed; she dressed herself most hastily, with her trembling fingers. Her father was asleep on the settle downstairs; and useless, and worse than useless, if awake. But Susan flew out of the door, and down the quiet resounding street, towards the nearest doctor's house. Quickly she went, but as quickly a shadow followed, as if impelled by some sudden terror. Susan rang wildly at the nightbell—the shadow crouched near. The doctor looked out from an upstairs window.

"A little child has fallen downstairs, at No. 9 Crown Street, and is very ill—dying, I'm afraid. Please, for God's sake, sir, come directly. No. 9 Crown Street."

"I'll be there directly," said he, and shut the window.

"For that God you have just spoken about—for His sake—tell me, are you Susan Palmer? Is it my child that lies a-dying?" said the shadow, springing forwards, and clutching poor Susan's arm.

"It is a little child of two years old. I do not know whose it is; I love it as my own. Come with me, whoever you are; come with me."

The two sped along the silent streets—as silent as the night were they. They entered the house; Susan snatched up the light, and carried it upstairs. The other followed.

She stood with wild, glaring eyes by the bedside, never looking at Susan, but hungrily gazing at the little, white, still child. She stooped down, and put her hand tight on her own heart, as if to still its beating, and bent her ear to the pale lips. Whatever the result was, she did not speak; but threw off the bedclothes wherewith Susan had tenderly covered up the little creature, and felt its left side.

Then she threw up her arms, with a cry of wild despair.

"She is dead! she is dead!"

She looked so fierce, so mad, so haggard, that, for an instant, Susan was terrified; the next, the holy God had put courage into her heart, and her pure arms were round that guilty, wretched creature, and her tears were falling fast and warm upon her breast. But she was thrown off with violence.

"You killed her—you slighted her—you let her fall down those stairs! you killed her!"

Susan cleared off the thick mist before her, and, gazing at the mother with her clear, sweet angel eyes, said, mournfully—

"I would have laid down my own life for her."

"Oh, the murder is on my soul!" exclaimed the wild, bereaved mother, with the fierce impetuosity of one who has none to love her, and to be beloved, regard to whom might teach self-restraint.

"Hush!" said Susan, her finger on her lips. "Here is the doctor. God may suffer her to live."

The poor mother turned sharp round. The doctor mounted the stair. Ah! that mother was right; the little child was really dead and gone.

And when he confirmed her judgment, the mother fell down in a fit. Susan, with her deep grief, had to forget herself, and forget her darling (her charge for years), and question the doctor what she must do with the poor wretch, who lay on the floor in such extreme of misery.

"She is the mother!" said she.

"Why did she not take better care of her child?" asked he, almost angrily.

But Susan only said, "The little child slept with me; and it was I that left her."

"I will go back and made up a composing draught; and while I am away you must get her to bed."

Susan took out some of her own clothes, and softly undressed the stiff, powerless form. There was no other bed in the house but the one in which her father slept. So she tenderly lifted the body of her darling; and was going to take it downstairs, but the mother opened her eyes, and seeing what she was about, she said—

"I am not worthy to touch her, I am so wicked. I have spoken to you as I never should have spoken; but I think you are very good. May I have my own child to lie in my arms for a little while?"

Her voice was so strange a contrast to what it had been before she had gone into the fit, that Susan hardly recognized it; it was now so unspeakably soft, so irresistibly pleading; the features too had lost their fierce expression, and were almost as placid as death. Susan could not speak, but she carried the little child, and laid it in its mother's arms; then, as she looked at them, something overpowered her, and she knelt down, crying aloud—

"Oh, my God, my God, have mercy on her, and forgive and comfort her."

But the mother kept smiling, and stroking the little face, murmuring soft, tender words, as if it were alive. She was

going mad, Susan thought; but she prayed on, and on, and ever still she prayed with streaming eyes.

The doctor came with the draught. The mother took it, with docile unconsciousness of its nature as medicine. The doctor sat by her; and soon she fell asleep. Then he rose softly, and, beckoning Susan to the door, he spoke to her there.

"You must take the corpse out of her arms. She will not awake. That draught will make her sleep for many hours. I will call before noon again. It is now daylight. Good-bye."

Susan shut him out; and then, gently extricating the dead child from its mother's arms, she could not resist making her own quiet moan over her darling. She tried to learn off its little placid face, dumb and pale before her.

> "Not all the scalding tears of care
> Shall wash away that vision fair;
> Not all the thousand thoughts that rise,
> Not all the sights that dim her eyes,
> Shall e'er usurp the place
> Of that little angel-face."

And then she remembered what remained to be done. She saw that all was right in the nouse; her father was still dead asleep on the settle, in spite of all the noise of the night. She went out through the quiet streets, deserted still, although it was broad daylight, and to where the Leighs lived. Mrs. Leigh, who kept her country hours, was opening her window-shutters. Susan took her by the arm, and, without speaking, went into the house-place. There she knelt down before the astonished Mrs. Leigh, and cried as she had never done before; but the miserable night had overpowered her, and she who had gone through so much calmly, now that the pressure seemed removed, could not find the power to speak.

"My poor dear! What has made thy heart so sore as to come and cry a-this-ons? Speak and tell me. Nay, cry on,

poor wench, if thou canst not speak yet. It will ease the heart, and then thou canst tell me."

"Nanny is dead!" said Susan. "I left her to go to father, and she fell downstairs, and never breathed again. Oh, that's my sorrow! But I've more to tell. Her mother is come—is in our house! Come and see if it's your Lizzie."

Mrs. Leigh could not speak, but, trembling, put on her things, and went with Susan in dizzy haste back to Crown Street.

CHAPTER IV

As they entered the house in Crown Street, they perceived that the door would not open freely on its hinges, and Susan instinctively looked behind to see the cause of the obstruction. She immediately recognized the appearance of a little parcel, wrapped in a scrap of newspaper, and evidently containing money. She stooped and picked it up. "Look!" said she sorrowfully, "the mother was bringing this for her child last night."

But Mrs. Leigh did not answer. So near to the ascertaining if it were her lost child or no, she could not be arrested, but pressed onwards with trembling steps, and a beating, fluttering heart. She entered the bedroom, dark and still. She took no heed of the little corpse over which Susan paused, but she went straight to the bed, and withdrawing the curtain, saw Lizzie; but not the former Lizzie, bright, gay, buoyant, and undimmed. This Lizzie was old before her time; her beauty was gone; deep lines of care, and, alas! of want (or thus the mother imagined) were printed on the cheek, so round, and fair, and smooth, when last she gladdened her mother's eyes. Even in her sleep she bore the look of woe and despair which was the prevalent expression

of her face by day; even in her sleep she had forgotten how to smile. But all these marks of the sin and sorrow she had passed through only made her mother love her the more. She stood looking at her with greedy eyes, which seemed as though no gazing could satisfy their longing; and at last she stooped down and kissed the pale, worn hand that lay outside the bedclothes. No touch disturbed the sleeper; the mother need not have laid the hand so gently down upon the counterpane. There was no sign of life, save only now and then a deep sob-like sigh. Mrs. Leigh sat down beside the bed, and still holding back the curtain, looked on and on, as if she could never be satisfied.

Susan would fain have stayed by her darling one; but she had many calls upon her time and thoughts, and her will had now, as ever, to be given up to that of others. All seemed to devolve the burden of their cares on her. Her father, ill-humoured from his last night's intemperance, did not scruple to reproach her with being the cause of little Nanny's death; and when, after bearing his upbraiding meekly for some time, she could no longer restrain herself, but began to cry, he wounded her even more by his injudicious attempts at comfort; for he said it was as well the child was dead; it was none of theirs, and why should they be troubled with it? Susan wrung her hands at this, and came and stood before her father, and implored him to forbear. Then she had to take all requisite steps for the coroner's inquest; she had to arrange for the dismissal of her school; she had to summon a little neighbour, and send his willing feet on a message to William Leigh, who, she felt, ought to be informed of his mother's whereabouts, and of the whole state of affairs. She asked her messenger to tell him to come and speak to her; that his mother was at her house. She was thankful that her father sauntered out to have a gossip at the nearest coachstand, and to relate as many of the night's adventures as he knew; for as yet he was in ignorance of the watcher and the watched, who silently passed away the hours upstairs.

At dinner-time Will came. He looked red, glad, impatient, excited. Susan stood calm and white before him, her soft, loving eyes gazing straight into his.

"Will," said she, in a low, quiet voice, "your sister is upstairs."

"My sister!" said he, as if affrighted at the idea, and losing his glad look in one of gloom. Susan saw it, and her heart sank a little, but she went on as calm to all appearance as ever.

"She was little Nanny's mother, as perhaps you know. Poor little Nanny was killed last night by a fall downstairs." All the calmness was gone; all the suppressed feeling was displayed in spite of every effort. She sat down, and hid her face from him, and cried bitterly. He forgot everything but the wish, the longing to comfort her. He put his arm round her waist, and bent over her. But all he could say, was, "Oh, Susan, how can I comfort you? Don't take on so—pray don't!" He never changed the words, but the tone varied every time he spoke. At last she seemed to regain her power over herself; and she wiped her eyes, and once more looked upon him with her own quiet, earnest, unfearing gaze.

"Your sister was near the house. She came in on hearing my words to the doctor. She is asleep now, and your mother is watching her. I wanted to tell you all myself. Would you like to see your mother?"

"No!" said he. "I would rather see none but thee. Mother told me thou knew'st all." His eyes were downcast in their shame.

But the holy and pure did not lower or veil her eyes.

She said, "Yes, I know all,—all but her sufferings. Think what they must have been!"

He made answer, low and stern, "She deserved them all; every jot."

"In the eye of God, perhaps she does. He is the Judge; we are not."

"Oh!" she said, with a sudden burst, "Will Leigh! I have thought so well of you; don't go and make me think

you cruel and hard. Goodness is not goodness unless there is mercy and tenderness with it. There is your mother, who has been nearly heart-broken, now full of rejoicing over her child. Think of your mother."

"I do think of her," said he. "I remember the promise I gave her last night. Thou shouldst give me time. I would do right in time. I never think it o'er in quiet. But I will do what is right and fitting, never fear. Thou hast spoken out very plain to me, and misdoubted me, Susan; I love thee so, that thy words cut me. If I did hang back a bit from making sudden promises, it was because not even for love of thee, would I say what I was not feeling; and at first I could not feel all at once as thou wouldst have me. But I'm not cruel and hard; for if I had been, I should na' have grieved as I have done."

He made as if he were going away; and indeed he did feel he would rather think it over in quiet. But Susan, grieved at her incautious words, which had all the appearance of harshness, went a step or two nearer—paused—and then, all over blushes, said in a low, soft whisper—

"Oh, Will! I beg your pardon. I am very sorry. Won't you forgive me?"

She who had always drawn back, and been so reserved, said this in the very softest manner; with eyes now uplifted beseechingly, now dropped to the ground. Her sweet confusion told more than words could do; and Will turned back, all joyous in his certainty of being beloved, and took her in his arms, and kissed her.

"My own Susan!" he said.

Meanwhile the mother watched her child in the room above.

It was late in the afternoon before she awoke, for the sleeping draught had been very powerful. The instant she awoke, her eyes were fixed on her mother's face with a gaze as unflinching as if she were fascinated. Mrs. Leigh did not turn away, nor move; for it seemed as if motion would unlock the stony command over herself which, while

so perfectly still, she was enabled to preserve. But by-and-by Lizzie cried out, in a piercing voice of agony—

"Mother, don't look at me; I have been so wicked!" and instantly she hid her face, and grovelled among the bedclothes, and lay like one dead, so motionless was she.

Mrs. Leigh knelt down by the bed, and spoke in the most soothing tones.

"Lizzie, dear, don't speak so. I'm thy mother, darling; don't be afeard of me. I never left off loving thee, Lizzie. I was always a-thinking of thee. Thy father forgave thee afore he died." (There was a little start here, but no sound was heard.) "Lizzie, lass, I'll do ought for thee; I'll live for thee; only don't be afeard of me. Whate'er thou art or hast been, we'll ne'er speak on't. We'll leave th' oud times behind us, and go back to the Upclose Farm. I but left it to find thee, my lass; and God has led me to thee. Blessed be His name. And God is good, too, Lizzie. Thou hast not forgot thy Bible, I'll be bound, for thou wert always a scholar. I'm no reader, but I learnt off them texts to comfort me a bit, and I've said them many a time a day to myself. Lizzie, lass, don't hide thy head so; it's thy mother as is speaking to thee. Thy little child clung to me only yesterday; and if it's gone to be an angel, it will speak to God for thee. Nay, don't sob a-that-'as; thou shalt have it again in heaven; I know thou'lt strive to get there, for thy little Nancy's sake—and listen! I'll tell thee God's promises to them that are penitent—only doan't be afeard."

Mrs. Leigh folded her hands, and strove to speak very clearly, while she repeated every tender and merciful text she could remember. She could tell from the breathing that her daughter was listening; but she was so dizzy and sick herself when she had ended, that she could not go on speaking. It was all she could do to keep from crying aloud.

At last she heard her daughter's voice.

"Where have they taken her to?" she asked.

"She is downstairs. So quiet, and peaceful, and happy she looks."

"Could she speak! Oh, if God—if I might but have heard her little voice! Mother, I used to dream of it. May I see her once again? Oh, mother, if I strive very hard and God is very merciful, and I go to heaven, I shall not know her—I shall not know my own again; she will shun me as a stranger, and cling to Susan Palmer and to you. Oh, woe! Oh, woe!" She shook with exceeding sorrow.

In her earnestness of speech she had uncovered her face, and tried to read Mrs. Leigh's thoughts through her looks. And when she saw those aged eyes brimming full of tears, and marked the quivering lips, she threw her arms round the faithful mother's neck, and wept there as she had done in many a childish sorrow, but with a deeper, a more wretched grief.

Her mother hushed her on her breast; and lulled her as if she were a baby; and she grew still and quiet.

They sat thus for a long, long time. At last, Susan Palmer came up with some tea and bread and butter for Mrs. Leigh. She watched the mother feed her sick, unwilling child, with every fond inducement to eat which she could devise; they neither of them took notice of Susan's presence. That night they lay in each other's arms; but Susan slept on the ground beside them.

They took the little corpse (the little unconscious sacrifice, whose early calling home had reclaimed her poor wandering mother) to the hills, which in her lifetime she had never seen. They dared not lay her by the stern grandfather in Milne Row churchyard, but they bore her to a lone moorland graveyard, where, long ago, the Quakers used to bury their dead. They laid her there on the sunny slope, where the earliest spring flowers blow.

Will and Susan live at the Upclose Farm. Mrs. Leigh and Lizzie dwell in a cottage so secluded that, until you drop into the very hollow where it is placed, you do not see it. Tom is a schoolmaster in Rochdale, and he and Will help to support their mother. I only know that, if the cottage be hidden in a green hollow of the hills, every sound of sorrow

in the whole upland is heard there—every call of suffering or of sickness for help is listened to by a sad, gentle-looking woman, who rarely smiles (and when she does her smile is more sad than other people's tears), but who comes out of her seclusion whenever there is a shadow in any household. Many hearts bless Lizzie Leigh, but she—she prays always and ever for forgiveness—such forgiveness as may enable her to see her child once more. Mrs. Leigh is quiet and happy. Lizzie is, to her eyes, something precious—as the lost piece of silver—found once more. Susan is the bright one who brings sunshine to all. Children grow around her and call her blessed. One is called Nanny; her Lizzie often takes to the sunny graveyard in the uplands, and while the little creature gathers the daisies, and makes chains, Lizzie sits by a little grave and weeps bitterly.

THE WELL OF PEN-MORFA

CHAPTER I

Of a hundred travellers who spend a night at Trê-Madoc, in North Wales, there is not one, perhaps, who goes to the neighbouring village of Pen-Morfa. The new town, built by Mr. Maddocks, Shelley's friend, has taken away all the importance of the ancient village—formerly, as its name imports, "the head of the marsh;" that marsh which Mr. Maddocks drained and dyked, and reclaimed from the Traeth Mawr, till Pen-Morfa, against the walls of whose cottages the winter tides lashed in former days, has come to stand, high and dry, three miles from the sea, on a disused road to Caernarvon. I do not think there has been a new cottage built in Pen-Morfa this hundred years, and many an old one has dates in some obscure corner which tell of the fifteenth century. The joists of timber, where they meet overhead, are blackened with the smoke of centuries. There is one large room, round which the beds are built like cupboards, with wooden doors to open and shut, somewhat in the old Scotch fashion, I imagine; and below the bed (at least in one instance I can testify that this was the case, and I was told it was not uncommon) is a great wide wooden drawer, which contained the oat-cake, baked for some months' consumption by the family. They call the promontory of Llyn (the point at the end of Caernarvonshire), *Welsh* Wales: I think they might call Pen-Morfa a Welsh Welsh village; it is so national in its ways, and buildings, and inhabitants, and so different from the towns and hamlets into which the English throng in summer. How these said inhabitants of Pen-Morfa ever

are distinguished by their names, I, uninitiated, cannot tell. I only know for a fact, that in a family there with which I am acquainted, the eldest son's name is John Jones, because his father's was John Thomas; that the second son is called David Williams, because his grandfather was William Wynn; and that the girls are called indiscriminately by the names of Thomas and Jones. I have heard some of the Welsh chuckle over the way in which they have baffled the barristers at Caernarvon assizes, denying the name under which they have been subpœnaed to give evidence, if they were unwilling witnesses. I could tell you of a great deal which is peculiar and wild in these true Welsh people, who are what I suppose we English were a century ago; but I must hasten on to my tale.

I have received great, true, beautiful kindness from one of the members of the family of whom I just now spoke as living at Pen-Morfa; and when I found that they wished me to drink tea with them, I gladly did so, though my friend was the only one in the house who could speak English at all fluently. After tea, I went with them to see some of their friends; and it was then I saw the interiors of the houses of which I have spoken. It was an autumn evening: we left mellow sunset-light in the open air when we entered the houses in which all seemed dark, save in the ruddy sphere of the firelight, for the windows were very small, and deep-set in the thick walls. Here were an old couple, who welcomed me in Welsh, and brought forth milk and oat-cake with patriarchal hospitality. Sons and daughters had married away from them; they lived alone; he was blind, or nearly so; and they sat one on each side of the fire, so old and so still (till we went in and broke the silence) that they seemed to be listening for death. At another house lived a woman, stern and severe-looking. She was busy hiving a swarm of bees, alone and unassisted. I do not think my companion would have chosen to speak to her; but seeing her out in her hill-side garden, she made some inquiry in Welsh, which was answered in the most mournful tone I ever heard in my

life; a voice of which the freshness and "timbre" had been choked up by tears long years ago. I asked who she was. I dare say the story is common enough; but the sight of the woman and her few words had impressed me. She had been the beauty of Pen-Morfa; had been in service; had been taken to London by the family whom she served; had come down, in a year or so, back to Pen-Morfa; her beauty gone into that sad, wild, despairing look which I saw, and she about to become a mother. Her father had died during her absence, and left her a very little money; and after her child was born, she took the little cottage where I saw her, and made a scanty living by the produce of her bees. She associated with no one. One event had made her savage and distrustful to her kind. She kept so much aloof that it was some time before it became known that her child was deformed, and lost the use of its lower limbs. Poor thing! When I saw the mother, it had been for fifteen years bed-ridden. But go past when you would in the night, you saw a light burning; it was often that of the watching mother, solitary and friendless, soothing the moaning child; or you might hear her crooning some old Welsh air, in hopes to still the pain with the loud monotonous music. Her sorrow was so dignified, and her mute endurance and her patient love won her such respect, that the neighbours would fain have been friends; but she kept alone and solitary. This is a most true story. I hope that woman and her child are dead now, and their souls above.

Another story which I heard of these old primitive dwellings I mean to tell at somewhat greater length.

There are rocks high above Pen-Morfa; they are the same that hang over Trê-Madoc, but near Pen-Morfa they sweep away and are lost in the plain. Everywhere they are beautiful. The great, sharp ledges, which would otherwise look hard and cold, are adorned with the brightest coloured moss and the golden lichen. Close to, you see the scarlet leaves of the crane's-bill and the tufts of purple heather, which fill up every cleft and cranny; but, in the distance,

you see only the general effect of infinite richness of colour, broken here and there by great masses of ivy. At the foot of these rocks come a rich, verdant meadow or two, and then you are at Pen-Morfa. The village well is sharp down under the rocks. There are one or two large sloping pieces of stone in that last field, on the road leading to the well, which are always slippery; slippery in the summer's heat, almost as much as in the frost of winter, when some little glassy stream that runs over them is turned into a thin sheet of ice. Many, many years back—a lifetime ago—there lived in Pen-Morfa a widow and her daughter. Very little is required in those out-of-the-way Welsh villages. The wants of the people are very simple. Shelter, fire, a little oat-cake and butter-milk, and garden-produce; perhaps some pork and bacon from the pig in winter; clothing, which is principally of home manufacture and of the most enduring kind: these take very little money to purchase, especially in a district into which the large capitalists have not yet come to buy up the two or three acres of the peasants; and nearly every man about Pen-Morfa owned, at the time of which I speak, his dwelling and some land beside.

Eleanor Gwynn inherited the cottage (by the roadside, on the left hand as you go from Trê-Madoc to Pen-Morfa) in which she and her husband had lived all their married life, and a small garden sloping southwards, in which her bees lingered before winging their way to the more distant heather. She took rank among her neighbours as the possessor of a moderate independence—not rich, and not poor. But the young men of Pen-Morfa thought her very rich in the possession of a most lovely daughter. Most of us know how very pretty Welsh women are, but, from all accounts, Nest Gwynn (Nest, or Nesta, is the Welsh for Agnes) was more regularly beautiful than any one for miles round. The Welsh are still fond of triads, and "as beautiful as a summer's morning at sunrise, as a white seagull on the green sea wave, and as Nest Gwynn," is yet a saying in that district. Nest knew she was beautiful, and delighted in it. Her mother

sometimes checked her in her happy pride, and sometimes reminded her that beauty was a great gift of God (for the Welsh are a very pious people); but when she began her little homily, Nest came dancing to her, and knelt down before her, and put her face up to be kissed, and so, with a sweet interruption, she stopped her mother's lips. Her high spirits made some few shake their heads, and some called her a flirt and a coquette, for she could not help trying to please all, both old and young, both men and women. A very little from Nest sufficed for this; a sweet glittering smile, a word of kindness, a merry glance, or a little sympathy; all these pleased and attracted: she was like the fairy-gifted child, and dropped inestimable gifts. But some, who had interpreted her smiles and kind words rather as their wishes led them than as they were really warranted, found that the beautiful, beaming Nest could be decided and saucy enough; and so they revenged themselves by calling her a flirt. Her mother heard it, and sighed; but Nest only laughed.

It was her work to fetch water for the day's use from the well I told you about. Old people say it was the prettiest sight in the world to see her come stepping lightly and gingerly over the stones with the pail of water balanced on her head; she was too adroit to need to steady it with her hand. They say, now that they can afford to be charitable and speak the truth, that in all her changes to other people there never was a better daughter to a widowed mother than Nest. There is a picturesque old farmhouse under Moel Gwynn, on the road from Trê-Madoc to Criccaeth, called by some Welsh name which I now forget; but its meaning in English is "The End of Time"—a strange, boding, ominous name. Perhaps the builder meant his work to endure till the end of time. I do not know; but there the old house stands, and will stand for many a year. When Nest was young, it belonged to one Edward Williams; his mother was dead, and people said he was on the look-out for a wife. They told Nest so, but she tossed her head and reddened, and said she thought he might look long before he got one;

so it was not strange that one morning when she went to the well, one autumn morning when the dew lay heavy on the grass, and the thrushes were busy among the mountain-ash berries, Edward Williams happened to be there, on his way to the coursing-match near, and somehow his greyhounds threw her pail of water over in their romping play, and she was very long in filling it again; and when she came home she threw her arms round her mother's neck, and, in a passion of joyous tears, told her that Edward Williams, of "The End of Time," had asked her to marry him, and that she had said "Yes."

Eleanor Gwynn shed her tears too; but they fell quietly when she was alone. She was thankful Nest had found a protector—one suitable in age and apparent character, and above her in fortune; but she knew she should miss her sweet daughter in a thousand household ways; miss her in the evening by the fireside; miss her when at night she wakened up with a start from a dream of her youth, and saw her fair face lying calm in the moonlight, pillowed by her side. Then she forgot her dream, and blessed her child, and slept again. But who could be so selfish as to be sad when Nest was so supremely happy; she danced and sang more than ever; and then sat silent, and smiled to herself; if spoken to, she started and came back to the present with a scarlet blush which told what she had been thinking of.

That was a sunny, happy, enchanted autumn. But the winter was nigh at hand; and with it came sorrow. One fine frosty morning, Nest went out with her lover—she to the well, he to some farming business, which was to be transacted at the little inn of Pen-Morfa. He was late for his appointment; so he left her at the entrance of the village, and hastened to the inn; and she, in her best cloak and new hat (put on against her mother's advice; but they were a recent purchase, and very becoming), went through the Dol Mawr, radiant with love and happiness. One who lived until lately met her going down towards the well that morning, and said he turned round to look after her—she seemed

unusually lovely. He wondered at the time at her wearing her Sunday clothes; for the pretty, hooded blue-cloth cloak is kept among the Welsh women as a church and market garment, and not commonly used, even on the coldest days of winter, for such household errands as fetching water from the well. However, as he said, "It was not possible to look in her face, and 'fault' anything she wore." Down the sloping stones the girl went blithely with her pail. She filled it at the well; and then she took off her hat, tied the strings together, and slung it over her arm. She lifted the heavy pail and balanced it on her head. But, alas! in going up the smooth, slippery, treacherous rock, the encumbrance of her cloak—it might be such a trifle as her slung hat—something, at any rate, took away her evenness of poise; the freshet had frozen on the slanting stone, and was one coat of ice; poor Nest fell, and put out her hip. No more flushing rosy colour on that sweet face; no more look of beaming innocent happiness; instead, there was deadly pallor, and filmy eyes, over which dark shades seemed to chase each other as the shoots of agony grew more and more intense. She screamed once or twice; but the exertion (involuntary, and forced out of her by excessive pain) overcame her, and she fainted. A child, coming an hour or two afterwards, on the same errand, saw her lying there, ice-glued to the stone, and thought she was dead. It flew crying back.

"Nest Gwynn is dead! Nest Gwynn is dead!" and, crazy with fear, it did not stop until it had hid its head in its mother's lap. The village was alarmed, and all who were able went in haste towards the well. Poor Nest had often thought she was dying in that dreary hour; had taken fainting for death, and struggled against it; and prayed that God would keep her alive till she could see her lover's face once more; and when she did see it, white with terror, bending over her, she gave a feeble smile, and let herself faint away into unconsciousness.

Many a month she lay on her bed unable to move. Sometimes she was delirious, sometimes worn-out into the

deepest depression. Through all, her mother watched her with tenderest care. The neighbours would come and offer help. They would bring presents of country dainties; and I do not suppose that there was a better dinner than ordinary cooked in any household in Pen-Morfa parish, but a portion of it was sent to Eleanor Gwynn, if not for her sick daughter, to try and tempt her herself to eat and be strengthened; for to no one would she delegate the duty of watching over her child. Edward Williams was for a long time most assiduous in his inquiries and attentions; but by-and-by (ah! you see the dark fate of poor Nest now), he slackened, so little at first that Eleanor blamed herself for her jealousy on her daughter's behalf, and chid her suspicious heart. But as spring ripened into summer, and Nest was still bedridden, Edward's coolness was visible to more than the poor mother. The neighbours would have spoken to her about it, but she shrunk from the subject as if they were probing a wound. "At any rate," thought she, "Nest shall be strong before she is told about it. I will tell lies—I shall be forgiven—but I must save my child; and when she is stronger, perhaps I may be able to comfort her. Oh! I wish she would not speak to him so tenderly and trustfully, when she is delirious. I could curse him when she does." And then Nest would call for her mother, and Eleanor would go and invent some strange story about the summonses Edward had had to Caernarvon assizes, or to Harlech cattle-market. But at last she was driven to her wit's end; it was three weeks since he had even stopped at the door to inquire, and Eleanor, mad with anxiety about her child, who was silently pining off to death for want of tidings of her lover, put on her cloak, when she had lulled her daughter to sleep one fine June evening, and set off to "The End of Time." The great plain which stretches out like an amphitheatre, in the half-circle of hills formed by the ranges of Moel Gwynn and the Trê-Madoc Rocks, was all golden-green in the mellow light of sunset. To Eleanor it might have been black with winter frost—she never noticed outward things till she reached

"The End of Time;" and there, in the little farm-yard, she was brought to a sense of her present hour and errand by seeing Edward. He was examining some hay, newly stacked; the air was scented by its fragrance, and by the lingering sweetness of the breath of the cows. When Edward turned round at the foot-step and saw Eleanor, he coloured and looked confused; however, he came forward to meet her in a cordial manner enough.

"It's a fine evening," said he. "How is Nest? But, indeed, your being here is a sign she is better. Won't you come in and sit down?" He spoke hurriedly, as if affecting a welcome which he did not feel.

"Thank you. I'll just take this milking-stool and sit down here. The open air is like balm, after being shut up so long."

"It is a long time," he replied; "more than five months."

Mrs. Gwynn was trembling at heart. She felt an anger which she did not wish to show; for if by any manifestations of temper or resentment she lessened or broke the waning thread of attachment which bound him to her daughter, she felt she should never forgive herself. She kept inwardly saying, "Patience, patience! he may be true, and love her yet;" but her indignant convictions gave her words the lie.

"It's a long time, Edward Williams, since you've been near us to ask after Nest," said she. "She may be better, or she may be worse for aught you know." She looked up at him reproachfully, but spoke in a gentle, quiet tone.

"I—you see the hay has been a long piece of work. The weather has been fractious—and a master's eye is needed. Besides," said he, as if he had found the reason for which he sought to account for his absence, "I have heard of her from Rowland Jones. I was at the surgery for some horse medicine—he told me about her:" and a shade came over his face, as he remembered what the doctor had said. Did he think that shade would escape the mother's eye?

"You saw Rowland Jones! Oh, man-alive, tell me what he said of my girl! He'll say nothing to me, but just hems

and haws the more I pray him. But you will tell me. You *must* tell me." She stood up and spoke in a tone of command, which his feeling of independence, weakened just then by an accusing conscience, did not enable him to resist. He strove to evade the question, however.

"It was an unlucky day that ever she went to the well!"

"Tell me what the doctor said of my child," repeated Mrs. Gwynn. "Will she live, or will she die?" He did not dare to disobey the imperious tone in which this question was put.

"Oh, she will live, don't be afraid. The doctor said she would live." He did not mean to lay any particular emphasis on the word "live," but somehow he did, and she, whose every nerve vibrated with anxiety, caught the word.

"She will live!" repeated she. "But there is something behind. Tell me, for I will know. If you won't say, I'll go to Rowland Jones to-night, and make him tell me what he has said to you."

There had passed something in this conversation between himself and the doctor which Edward did not wish to have known, and Mrs. Gwynn's threat had the desired effect. But he looked vexed and irritated.

"You have such impatient ways with you, Mrs. Gwynn," he remonstrated.

"I am a mother asking news of my sick child," said she. "Go on. What did he say? She'll live"—— as if giving the clue.

"She'll live, he has no doubt of that. But he thinks—now don't clench your hands so—I can't tell you if you look in that way; you are enough to frighten a man."

"I'm not speaking," said she, in a low, husky tone. "Never mind my looks: she'll live"——

"But she'll be a cripple for life. There! you would have it out," said he sulkily.

"A cripple for life," repeated she slowly. "And I'm one-and-twenty years older than she is!" She sighed heavily.

"And, as we're about it, I'll just tell you what is in my mind," said he, hurried and confused. "I've a deal of cattle, and the farm makes heavy work, as much as an able, healthy woman can do. So you see"—— He stopped, wishing her to understand his meaning without words. But she would not. She fixed her dark eyes on him, as if reading his soul, till he flinched under her gaze.

"Well," said she, at length, "say on. Remember, I've a deal of work in me yet, and what strength is mine is my daughter's."

"You're very good; but, altogether, you must be aware Nest will never be the same as she was."

"And you've not yet sworn in the face of God to take her for better, for worse; and, as she is worse"—she looked in his face, caught her breath, and went on—"as she is worse, why, you cast her off, not being church-tied to her. Though her body may be crippled, her poor heart is the same—alas! —and full of love for you. Edward, you don't mean to break it off because of our sorrows. You're only trying me, I know," said she, as if begging him to assure her that her fears were false. "But, you see, I'm a foolish woman—a poor, foolish woman—and ready to take fright at a few words." She smiled up in his face; but it was a forced, doubting smile, and his face still retained its sullen, dogged aspect.

"Nay, Mrs. Gwynn," said he, "you spoke truth at first. Your own good sense told you Nest would never be fit to be any man's wife—unless, indeed, she could catch Mr. Griffiths of Tynwntyrybwlch. He might keep her a carriage, may be." Edward really did not mean to be unfeeling; but he was obtuse, and wished to carry off his embarrassment by a kind of friendly joke, which he had no idea would sting the poor mother as it did. He was startled at her manner.

"Put it in words like a man. Whatever you mean by my child, say it for yourself, and don't speak as if my good sense had told me anything. I stand here doubting my

own thoughts, cursing my own fears. Don't be a coward. I ask you whether you and Nest are troth-plight?"

"I am not a coward. Since you ask me I answer, Nest and I *were* troth-plight, but we *are* not. I cannot—no one would expect me to wed a cripple. It's your own doing I've told you now. I had made up my mind, but I should have waited a bit before telling you."

"Very well," said she, and she turned to go away; but her wrath burst the flood-gates, and swept away discretion and forethought. She moved and stood in the gateway. Her lips parted, but no sound came. With an hysterical motion, she threw her arms suddenly up to heaven, as if bringing down lightning towards the grey old house to which she pointed as they fell, and then she spoke—

"The widow's child is unfriended. As surely as the Saviour brought the son of a widow from death to life, for her tears and cries, so surely will God and His angels watch over my Nest, and avenge her cruel wrongs." She turned away, weeping and wringing her hands.

Edward went indoors. He had no more desire to reckon his stores; he sat by the fire, looking gloomily at the red ashes. He might have been there half-an-hour or more when some one knocked at the door. He would not speak. He wanted no one's company. Another knock, sharp and loud. He did not speak. Then the visitor opened the door, and to his surprise—almost to his affright—Eleanor Gwynn came in.

"I knew you were here. I knew you could not go out into the clear, holy night as if nothing had happened. Oh! did I curse you? If I did, I beg you to forgive me; and I will try and ask the Almighty to bless you if you will but have a little mercy—a very little. It will kill my Nest if she knows the truth now—she is so very weak. Why, she cannot feed herself, she is so low and feeble. You would not wish to kill her, I think, Edward?" She looked at him as if expecting an answer; but he did not speak. She went down on her knees on the flags by him.

"You will give me a little time, Edward, to get her strong; won't you, now? I ask it on my bended knees! Perhaps, if I promise never to curse you again, you will come sometimes to see her, till she is well enough to know all is over, and her heart's hopes crushed. Only say you'll come for a month or so, as if you still loved her—the poor cripple, forlorn of the world. I'll get her strong, and not tax you long." Her tears fell too fast for her to go on.

"Get up, Mrs. Gwynn," Edward said. "Don't kneel to me. I have no objection to come and see Nest now and then, so that all is clear between you and me. Poor thing! I'm sorry, as it happens, she's so taken up with the thought of me."

"It was likely, was not it? and you to have been her husband before this time, if—oh, miserable me! to let my child go and dim her bright life! But you'll forgive me and come sometimes, just for a little quarter of an hour, once or twice a week. Perhaps she'll be asleep sometimes when you call; and then, you know, you need not come in. If she were not so ill, I'd never ask you."

So low and humble was the poor widow brought, through her exceeding love for her daughter.

CHAPTER II

Nest revived during the warm summer weather. Edward came to see her, and stayed the allotted quarter of an hour; but he dared not look her in the face. She was, indeed, a cripple; one leg was much shorter than the other, and she halted on a crutch. Her face, formerly so brilliant in colour, was wan and pale with suffering; the bright roses were gone, never to return. Her large eyes were sunk deep down in their hollow, cavernous sockets; but the light was in

them still when Edward came. Her mother dreaded her returning strength—dreaded, yet desired it; for the heavy burden of her secret was most oppressive at times, and she thought Edward was beginning to weary of his enforced attentions. One October evening she told her the truth. She even compelled her rebellious heart to take the cold, reasoning side of the question, and she told her child that her disabled frame was a disqualification for ever becoming a farmer's wife. She spoke hardly, because her inner agony and sympathy was such, she dared not trust herself to express the feelings that were rending her. But Nest turned away from cold reason; she revolted from her mother; she revolted from the world. She bound her sorrow tight up in her breast to corrode and fester there.

Night after night her mother heard her cries and moans —more pitiful, by far, than those wrung from her by bodily pain a year before; and night after night, if her mother spoke to soothe, she proudly denied the existence of any pain but what was physical, and consequent upon her accident.

"If she would but open her sore heart to me—to me, her mother," Eleanor wailed forth in prayer to God, "I would be content. Once it was enough to have my Nest all my own. Then came love, and I knew it would never be as before; and then I thought the grief I felt when Edward spoke to me was as sharp a sorrow as could be; but this present grief, O Lord my God, is worst of all, and Thou only, Thou, canst help!"

When Nest grew as strong as she was ever likely to be on earth, she was anxious to have as much labour as she could bear. She would not allow her mother to spare her anything. Hard work—bodily fatigue—she seemed to crave. She was glad when she was stunned by exhaustion into a dull insensibility of feeling. She was almost fierce when her mother, in those first months of convalescence, performed the household tasks which had formerly been hers; but she shrank from going out of doors. Her mother thought that she was unwilling to expose her changed appearance to the

neighbours' remarks, but Nest was not afraid of that; she was afraid of their pity, as being one deserted and cast off. If Eleanor gave way before her daughter's imperiousness, and sat by while Nest "tore" about her work with the vehemence of a bitter heart, Eleanor could have cried, but she durst not; tears, or any mark of commiseration, irritated the crippled girl so much—she even drew away from caresses. Everything was to go on as it had been before she had known Edward; and so it did, outwardly; but they trod carefully, as if the ground on which they moved was hollow, deceptive. There was no more careless ease! every word was guarded and every action planned. It was a dreary life to both. Once Eleanor brought in a little baby, a neighbour's child, to try and tempt Nest out of herself, by her old love of children. Nest's pale face flushed as she saw the innocent child in her mother's arms, and for a moment she made as if she would have taken it; but then she turned away, and hid her face behind her apron, and murmured, "I shall never have a child to lie in my breast and call me mother!" In a minute she arose, with compressed and tightened lips, and went about her household work without noticing the cooing baby again, till Mrs. Gwynn, heart-sick at the failure of her little plan, took it back to its parents.

One day the news ran through Pen-Morfa that Edward Williams was about to be married. Eleanor had long expected this intelligence. It came upon her like no new thing, but it was the filling-up of her cup of woe. She could not tell Nest. She sat listlessly in the house, and dreaded that each neighbour who came in would speak about the village news. At last some one did. Nest looked round from her employment, and talked of the event with a kind of cheerful curiosity as to the particulars, which made her informant go away and tell others that Nest had quite left off caring for Edward Williams. But when the door was shut, and Eleanor and she were left alone, Nest came and stood before her weeping mother like a stern accuser.

"Mother, why did not you let me die? Why did you keep me alive for this?" Eleanor could not speak, but she put her arms out towards her girl. Nest turned away, and Eleanor cried aloud in her soreness of spirit. Nest came again.

"Mother, I was wrong. You did your best. I don't know how it is I am so hard and cold. I wish I had died when I was a girl and had a feeling heart."

"Don't speak so, my child. God has afflicted you sore, and your hardness of heart is but for a time. Wait a little. Don't reproach yourself, my poor Nest. I understand your ways. I don't mind them, love. The feeling heart will come back to you in time. Anyways, don't think you're grieving me, because, love, that may sting you when I'm gone; and I'm not grieved, my darling. Most times we're very cheerful, I think."

After this, mother and child were drawn more together. But Eleanor had received her death from these sorrowful, hurrying events. She did not conceal the truth from herself, nor did she pray to live, as some months ago she had done, for her child's sake; she had found out that she had no power to console the poor wounded heart. It seemed to her as if her prayers had been of no avail; and then she blamed herself for this thought.

There are many Methodist preachers in this part of Wales. There was a certain old man, named David Hughes, who was held in peculiar reverence because he had known the great John Wesley. He had been captain of a Caernarvon slate vessel; he had traded in the Mediterranean, and had seen strange sights. In those early days (to use his own expression) he had lived without God in the world; but he went to mock John Wesley, and was converted by the white-haired patriarch, and remained to pray. Afterwards he became one of the earnest, self-denying, much-abused band of itinerant preachers who went forth under Wesley's direction to spread abroad a more earnest and practical spirit of religion. His rambles and travels were of

use to him. They extended his knowledge of the circumstances in which men are sometimes placed, and enlarged his sympathy with the tried and tempted. His sympathy, combined with the thoughtful experience of fourscore years, made him cognisant of many of the strange secrets of humanity, and when younger preachers upbraided the hard hearts they met with, and despaired of the sinners, he "suffered long, and was kind."

When Eleanor Gwynn lay low on her death-bed, David Hughes came to Pen-Morfa. He knew her history, and sought her out. To him she imparted the feelings I have described.

"I have lost my faith, David. The tempter has come, and I have yielded. I doubt if my prayers have been heard. Day and night have I prayed that I might comfort my child in her great sorrow; but God has not heard me. She has turned away from me, and refused my poor love. I wish to die now; but I have lost my faith, and have no more pleasure in the thought of going to God. What must I do, David?"

She hung upon his answer; and it was long in coming.

"I am weary of earth," said she mournfully, "and can I find rest in death even, leaving my child desolate and broken-hearted?"

"Eleanor," said David, "where you go all things will be made clear, and you will learn to thank God for the end of what now seems grievous and heavy to be borne. Do you think your agony has been greater than the awful agony in the Garden—or your prayers more earnest than that which He prayed in that hour when the great drops of blood ran down His face like sweat? We know that God heard Him, although no answer came to Him through the dread silence of that night. God's times are not our times. I have lived eighty and one years, and never yet have I known an earnest prayer fall to the ground unheeded. In an unknown way, and when no one looked for it, may be, the answer came: a fuller, more satisfying answer than heart could conceive of, although it might be different to what was expected.

Sister, you are going where in His light you will see light; you will learn there that in very faithfulness He has afflicted you!"

"Go on—you strengthen me," said she.

After David Hughes left that day, Eleanor was calm as one already dead, and past mortal strife. Nest was awed by the change. No more passionate weeping, no more sorrow in the voice; though it was low and weak, it sounded with a sweet composure. Her last look was a smile, her last word a blessing.

"Nest, tearless, streeked the poor worn body. She laid a plate with salt upon it on the breast, and lighted candles for the head and feet. It was an old Welsh custom; but when David Hughes came in, the sight carried him back to the time when he had seen the chapels in some old Catholic cathedral. Nest sat gazing on the dead with dry, hot eyes.

"She is dead," said David solemnly; "she died in Christ. Let us bless God, my child. He giveth and He taketh away."

"She is dead," said Nest, "my mother is dead. No one loves me now."

She spoke as if she were thinking aloud, for she did not look at David, or ask him to be seated.

"No one loves you now! No human creature, you mean. You are not yet fit to be spoken to concerning God's infinite love. I, like you, will speak of love for human creatures. I tell you if no one loves you, it is time for you to begin to love." He spoke almost severely (if David Hughes ever did); for, to tell the truth, he was repelled by her hard rejection of her mother's tenderness, about which the neighbours had told him.

"Begin to love!" said she, her eyes flashing. "Have I not loved? Old man, you are dim and worn-out. You do not remember what love is." She spoke with a scornful kind of pitying endurance. "I will tell you how I have loved by telling you the change it has wrought in me. I was once the beautiful Nest Gwynn; I am now a cripple, a poor, wan-faced cripple, old before my time. That is a

change, at least people think so." She paused, and then spoke lower: "I tell you, David Hughes, that outward change is as nothing compared to the change in my nature caused by the love I have felt—and have had rejected. I was gentle once, and, if you spoke a tender word, my heart came towards you as natural as a little child goes to its mammy. I never spoke roughly, even to the dumb creatures, for I had a kind feeling for all. Of late (since I loved, old man), I have been cruel in my thoughts to every one. I have turned away from tenderness with bitter indifference. Listen!" she spoke in a hoarse whisper: "I will own it. I have spoken hardly to her," pointing towards the corpse—"her, who was ever patient, and full of love for me. She did not know," she muttered; "she is gone to the grave without knowing how I loved her—I had such strange, mad, stubborn pride in me."

"Come back, mother! Come back," said she, crying wildly to the still, solemn corpse; "come back as a spirit or a ghost—only come back, that I may tell you how I loved you."

But the dead never come back.

The passionate adjuration ended in tears—the first she had shed. When they ceased, or were absorbed into long quivering sobs, David knelt down. Nest did not kneel, but bowed her head. He prayed, while his own tears fell fast. He rose up. They were both calm.

"Nest," said he, "your love has been the love of youth—passionate, wild, natural to youth. Henceforward, you must love like Christ, without thought of self, or wish for return. You must take the sick and the weary to your heart, and love them. That love will lift you up above the storms of the world into God's own peace. The very vehemence of your nature proves that you are capable of this. I do not pity you. You do not require pity. You are powerful enough to trample down your own sorrows into a blessing for others; and to others you will be a blessing. I see it before you; I see it in the answer to your mother's prayer."

The old man's dim eyes glittered as if they saw a vision; the firelight sprang up, and glinted on his long white hair. Nest was awed as if she saw a prophet, and a prophet he was to her.

When next David Hughes came to Pen-Morfa, he asked about Nest Gwynn, with a hovering doubt as to the answer. The inn-folk told him she was living still in the cottage, which was now her own.

"But would you believe it, David," said Mrs. Thomas, "she has gone and taken Mary Williams to live with her? You remember Mary Williams, I'm sure?"

No! David Hughes remembered no Mary Williams at Pen-Morfa.

"You must have seen her, for I know you've called at Thomas Griffiths', where the parish boarded her?"

"You don't mean the half-witted woman—the poor crazy creature?"

"But I do!" said Mrs. Thomas.

"I have seen her, sure enough, but I never thought of learning her name. And Nest Gwynn has taken her to live with her."

"Yes! I thought I should surprise you. She might have had many a decent girl for companion. My own niece, her that is an orphan, would have gone, and been thankful. Besides, Mary Williams is a regular savage at times; John Griffiths says there were days when he used to beat her till she howled again, and yet she would not do as he told her. Nay, once, he says, if he had not seen her eyes glare like a wild beast, from under the shadow of the table where she had taken shelter, and got pretty quickly out of her way, she would have flown upon him, and throttled him. He gave Nest fair warning of what she must expect, and he thinks some day she will be found murdered."

David Hughes thought a while. "How came Nest to take her to live with her?" asked he.

"Well! Folk say John Griffiths did not give her enough to eat. Half-wits, they tell me, take more to feed them than

others, and Eleanor Gwynn had given her oat-cake, and porridge a time or two, and most likely spoken kindly to her (you know Eleanor spoke kind to all); so some months ago, when John Griffiths had been beating her, and keeping her without food to try and tame her, she ran away, and came to Nest's cottage in the dead of night, all shivering and starved, for she did not know Eleanor was dead, and thought to meet with kindness from her, I've no doubt; and Nest remembered how her mother used to feed and comfort the poor idiot, and made her some gruel, and wrapped her up by the fire. And in the morning, when John Griffiths came in search of Mary, he found her with Nest; and Mary wailed so piteously at the sight of him, that Nest went to the parish officers, and offered to take her to board with her for the same money they gave to him. John says he was right glad to be off his bargain."

David Hughes knew there was a kind of remorse which sought relief in the performance of the most difficult and repugnant tasks. He thought he could understand how, in her bitter repentance for her conduct towards her mother, Nest had taken in the first helpless creature that came seeking shelter in her name. It was not what he would have chosen, but he knew it was God that had sent the poor wandering idiot there.

He went to see Nest the next morning. As he drew near the cottage—it was summer-time, and the doors and windows were all open—he heard an angry, passionate kind of sound that was scarcely human. That sound prevented his approach from being heard; and, standing at the threshold, he saw poor Mary Williams pacing backwards and forwards in some wild mood. Nest, cripple as she was, was walking with her, speaking low, soothing words till the pace was slackened, and time and breathing was given to put her arm around the crazy woman's neck, and soothe her by this tender caress into the quiet luxury of tears—tears which give the hot brain relief. Then David Hughes came in. His first words, as he took off his hat, standing on the lintel, were,

"The peace of God be upon this house." Neither he nor Nest recurred to the past, though solemn recollections filled their minds. Before he went, all three knelt and prayed; for, as Nest told him, some mysterious influence of peace came over the poor half-wit's mind, when she heard the holy words of prayer; and often, when she felt a paroxysm coming on, she would kneel and repeat a homily rapidly over, as if it were a charm to scare away the demon in possession; sometimes, indeed, the control over herself requisite for this effort was enough to dispel the fluttering burst. When David rose up to go, he drew Nest to the door.

"You are not afraid, my child?" asked he.

"No," she replied. "She is often very good and quiet. When she is not, I can bear it."

"I shall see your face on earth no more," said he. "God bless you!" He went on his way. Not many weeks after, David Hughes was borne to his grave.

The doors of Nest's heart were opened—opened wide by the love she grew to feel for crazy Mary, so helpless, so friendless, so dependent upon her. Mary loved her back again, as a dumb animal loves its blind master. It was happiness enough to be near her. In general, she was only too glad to do what she was bidden by Nest. But there were times when Mary was overpowered by the glooms and fancies of her poor disordered brain. Fearful times! No one knew how fearful. On those days Nest warned the little children who loved to come and play around her that they must not visit the house. The signal was a piece of white linen hung out of a side window. On those days the sorrowful and sick waited in vain for the sound of Nest's lame approach. But what she had to endure was only known to God, for she never complained. If she had given up the charge of Mary, or if the neighbours had risen, out of love and care for her life, to compel such a step, she knew what hard curses and blows, what starvation and misery, would await the poor creature.

She told of Mary's docility, and her affection, and her

innocent little sayings; but she never told the details of the occasional days of wild disorder and driving insanity.

Nest grew old before her time, in consequence of her accident. She knew that she was as old at fifty as many are at seventy. She knew it partly by the vividness with which the remembrance of the days of her youth came back to her mind, while the events of yesterday were dim and forgotten. She dreamt of her girlhood and youth. In sleep, she was once more the beautiful Nest Gwynn, the admired of all beholders, the light-hearted girl, beloved by her mother. Little circumstances connected with those early days, forgotten since the very time when they occurred, came back to her mind in her waking hours. She had a scar on the palm of her left hand, occasioned by the fall of a branch of a tree, when she was a child. It had not pained her since the first two days after the accident; but now it began to hurt her slightly; and clear in her ears was the crackling sound of the treacherous, rending wood; distinct before her rose the presence of her mother, tenderly binding up the wound. With these remembrances came a longing desire to see the beautiful fatal well once more before her death. She had never gone so far since the day when, by her fall there, she lost love and hope, and her bright, glad youth. She yearned to look upon its waters once again. This desire waxed as her life waxed. She told it to poor crazy Mary.

"Mary!" said she, "I want to go to the Rock Well. If you will help me, I can manage it. There used to be many a stone in the Dol Mawr on which I could sit and rest. We will go to-morrow morning before folks are astir."

Mary answered briskly, "Up, up! To the Rock Well. Mary will go. Mary will go." All day long she kept muttering to herself, "Mary will go."

Nest had the happiest dreams that night. Her mother stood beside her—not in the flesh, but in the bright glory of a blessed spirit. And Nest was no longer young—neither was she old—"they reckon not by days, nor years, where she was gone to dwell;" and her mother stretched out her

arms to her with a calm, glad look of welcome. She awoke; the woodlark was singing in the near copse—the little birds were astir, and rustling in their leafy nests. Nest arose, and called Mary. The two set out through the quiet lane. They went along slowly and silently. With many a pause they crossed the broad Dol Mawr, and carefully descended the sloping stones, on which no trace remained of the hundreds of feet that had passed over them since Nest was last there. The clear water sparkled and quivered in the early sunlight; the shadows of the birch-leaves were stirred on the ground; the ferns—Nest could have believed that they were the very same ferns which she had seen thirty years before—hung wet and dripping where the water overflowed: a thrush chanted matins from a hollybush near; and the running stream made a low, soft, sweet accompaniment.

All was the same. Nature was as fresh and young as ever. It might have been yesterday that Edward Williams had overtaken her, and told her his love—she thought of his words—his handsome looks (he was a grey, hard-featured man by this time)—and then she recalled the fatal wintry morning when joy and youth had fled; and, as she remembered that faintness of pain, a new, a real faintness—no echo of the memory—came over her. She leant her back against a rock, without a moan or sigh, and died! She found immortality by the well-side, instead of her fragile, perishing youth. She was so calm and placid that Mary (who had been dipping her fingers in the well, to see the waters drop off in the gleaming sunlight) thought she was asleep, and for some time continued her amusement in silence. At last she turned, and said—

"Mary is tired. Mary wants to go home." Nest did not speak, though the idiot repeated her plaintive words. She stood and looked till a strange terror came over her—a terror too mysterious to be borne.

"Mistress, wake! Mistress, wake!" she said, wildly shaking the form.

But Nest did not awake. And the first person who came

to the well that morning found crazy Mary sitting, awestruck, by the poor dead Nest. They had to get the poor creature away by force, before they could remove the body.

Mary is in Trê-Madoc workhouse. They treat her pretty kindly, and, in general, she is good and tractable. Occasionally, the old paroxysms come on; and, for a time, she is unmanageable. But some one thought of speaking to her about Nest. She stood arrested at the name; and, since then, it is astonishing to see what efforts she makes to curb her insanity; and when the dread time is past, she creeps up to the matron, and says, "Mary has tried to be good. Will God let her go to Nest now?"

THE MOORLAND COTTAGE

CHAPTER I

If you take the turn to the left after you pass the lyke-gate at Combehurst Church, you will come to the wooden bridge over the brook; keep along the field-path, which mounts higher and higher, and, in half a mile or so, you will be in a breezy upland field, almost large enough to be called a down, where sheep pasture on the short, fine elastic turf. You look down on Combehurst and its beautiful church-spire. After the field is crossed, you come to a common, richly coloured with the golden gorse and the purple heather, which in summer-time send out their warm scents into the quiet air. The swelling waves of the upland make a near horizon against the sky; the line is only broken in one place by a small grove of Scotch firs, which always look black and shadowed even at mid-day, when all the rest of the landscape seems bathed in sunlight. The lark quivers and sings high up in the air; too high—in too dazzling a region for you to see her. Look! she drops into sight; but, as if loth to leave the heavenly radiance, she balances herself and floats in the ether. Now she falls suddenly right into her nest, hidden among the ling, unseen except by the eyes of Heaven, and the small bright insects that run hither and thither on the elastic flower-stalks. With something like the sudden drop of the lark, the path goes down a green abrupt descent; and in a basin, surrounded by the grassy hills, there stands a dwelling, which is neither cottage nor house, but something between the two in size. Nor yet is it a farm, though surrounded by living things. It is, or rather it was, at the time

of which I speak, the dwelling of Mrs. Browne, the widow of the late curate of Combehurst. There she lived with her faithful old servant and her only children, a boy and girl. They were as secluded in their green hollow as the households in the German forest-tales. Once a week they emerged and crossed the common, catching on its summit the first sounds of the sweet-toned bells, calling them to church. Mrs. Browne walked first, holding Edward's hand. Old Nancy followed with Maggie; but they were all one party, and all talked together in a subdued and quiet tone, as beseemed the day. They had not much to say, their lives were too unbroken; for, excepting on Sundays, the widow and her children never went to Combehurst. Most people would have thought the little town a quiet, dreamy place; but to those two children it seemed the world; and after they had crossed the bridge, they each clasped more tightly the hands which they held, and looked shyly up from beneath their drooped eyelids when spoken to by any of their mother's friends. Mrs. Browne was regularly asked by some one to stay to dinner after morning church, and as regularly declined, rather to the timid children's relief; although in the week-days they sometimes spoke together in a low voice of the pleasure it would be to them if mamma would go and dine at Mr. Buxton's, where the little girl in white and that great, tall boy lived. Instead of staying there, or anywhere else, on Sundays, Mrs. Browne thought it her duty to go and cry over her husband's grave. The custom had arisen out of true sorrow for his loss, for a kinder husband, and more worthy man, had never lived; but the simplicity of her sorrow had been destroyed by the observation of others on the mode of its manifestation. They made way for her to cross the grass towards his grave; and she, fancying that it was expected of her, fell into the habit I have mentioned. Her children, holding each a hand, felt awed and uncomfortable, and were sensitively conscious how often they were pointed out, as a mourning group, to observation.

"I wish it would always rain on Sundays," said Edward one day to Maggie, in a garden-conference.

"Why?" asked she.

"Because then we bustle out of church, and get home as fast as we can, to save mamma's crape; and we have not to go and cry over papa."

"I don't cry," said Maggie. "Do you?"

Edward looked round before he answered, to see if they were quite alone, and then said—

"No; I was sorry a long time about papa, but one can't go on being sorry for ever. Perhaps grown-up people can."

"Mamma can," said little Maggie. "Sometimes I am very sorry, too; when I am by myself, or playing with you, or when I am wakened up by the moonlight in your room. Do you ever waken and fancy you heard papa calling you? I do sometimes; and then I am very sorry to think we shall never hear him calling us again."

"Ah, it's different with me, you know. He used to call me to lessons."

"Sometimes he called me when he was displeased with me. But I always dream that he was calling us in his own kind voice, as he used to do when he wanted us to walk with him, or to show us something pretty."

Edward was silent, playing with something on the ground. At last he looked round again, and having convinced himself that they could not be overheard, he whispered—

"Maggie, sometimes I don't think I'm sorry that papa is dead—when I'm naughty, you know; he would have been so angry with me if he had been here; and I think—only sometimes, you know—I'm rather glad he is not."

"Oh, Edward! you don't mean to say so, I know. Don't let us talk about him. We can't talk rightly, we're such little children. Don't, Edward, please."

Poor little Maggie's eyes filled with tears; and she never spoke again to Edward, or indeed to any one, about her dead father. As she grew older, her life became more actively

busy. The cottage and small outbuildings, and the garden and field, were their own; and on the produce they depended for much of their support. The cow, the pig, and the poultry, took up much of Nancy's time. Mrs. Browne and Maggie had to do a great deal of the housework; and when the beds were made, and the rooms swept and dusted, and the preparations for dinner ready, then, if there was any time, Maggie sat down to her lessons. Ned, who prided himself considerably on his sex, had been sitting all the morning in his father's arm-chair, in the little bookroom, "studying," as he chose to call it. Sometimes Maggie would pop her head in with a request that he would help her to carry the great pitcher of water upstairs, or do some other little household service; with which request he occasionally complied, but with so many complaints about the interruption that at last she told him she would never ask him again. Gently as this was said, he yet felt it as a reproach, and tried to excuse himself.

"You see, Maggie, a man must be educated to be a gentleman. Now, if a woman knows how to keep a house that's all that is wanted from her. So my time is of more consequence than yours. Mamma says I'm to go to college, and be a clergyman; so I must get on with my Latin."

Maggie submitted in silence, and almost felt it as an act of gracious condescension when, a morning or two afterwards, he came to meet her as she was toiling in from the well, carrying the great brown jug full of spring-water ready for dinner. "Here," said he, "let us put it in the shade behind the horse-mount. Oh, Maggie; look what you've done. Spilt it all with not turning quickly enough when I told you. Now you may fetch it again for yourself, for I'll have nothing to do with it."

"I did not understand you in time," said she softly. But he had turned away, and gone back in offended dignity to the house. Maggie had nothing to do but return to the well and fill it again. The spring was some distance off, in a little rocky dell. It was so cool after her hot walk that she

sat down in the shadow of the grey limestone rock, and looked at the ferns, wet with the dripping water. She felt sad, she knew not why. "I think Ned is sometimes very cross," thought she. "I did not understand he was carrying it there. Perhaps I am clumsy. Mamma says I am; and Ned says I am. Nancy never says so, and papa never said so. I wish I could help being clumsy and stupid. Ned says all women are so. I wish I was not a woman. It must be a fine thing to be a man. Oh dear! I must go up the field again with this heavy pitcher, and my arms do so ache!" She rose and climbed the steep brae. As she went she heard her mother's voice—

"Maggie! Maggie! there's no water for dinner, and the potatoes are quite boiled. Where *is* that child?"

They had begun dinner before she came down from brushing her hair and washing her hands. She was hurried and tired.

"Mother," said Ned, "mayn't I have some butter to these potatoes, as there is cold meat? They are so dry."

"Certainly, my dear. Maggie, go and fetch a pat of butter out of the dairy."

Maggie went from her untouched dinner without speaking.

"Here, stop, you child!" said Nancy, turning her back in the passage. "You go to your dinner – I'll fetch the butter. You've been running about enough to-day."

Maggie durst not go back without it, but she stood in the passage till Nancy returned; and then she put up her mouth to be kissed by the kind, rough old servant.

"Thou'rt a sweet one," said Nancy to herself, as she turned into the kitchen; and Maggie went back to her dinner with a soothed and lightened heart.

When the meal was ended, she helped her mother to wash up the old-fashioned glasses and spoons, which were treated with tender care and exquisite cleanliness in that house of decent frugality; and then, exchanging her pinafore for a black silk apron, the little maiden was wont to sit down to some useful piece of needlework, in doing which

her mother enforced the most dainty neatness of stitches. Thus every hour in its circle brought a duty to be fulfilled; but duties fulfilled are as pleasures to the memory, and little Maggie always thought those early childish days most happy, and remembered them only as filled with careless contentment.

Yet, at the time, they had their cares.

In fine summer days Maggie sat out of doors at her work. Just beyond the court lay the rocky moorland, always as gay as that with its profusion of flowers. If the court had its clustering noisettes, and fraxinellas, and sweet-briar, and great tall white lilies, the moorland had its little creeping scented rose, its straggling honeysuckle, and an abundance of yellow cistus; and here and there a grey rock cropped out of the ground, and over it the yellow stone-crop and scarlet-leaved crane's-bill grew luxuriantly. Such a rock was Maggie's seat. I believe she considered it her own, and loved it accordingly; although its real owner was a great lord, who lived far away, and had never seen the moor, much less the piece of grey rock, in his life.

The afternoon of the day which I have begun to tell you about, she was sitting there, and singing to herself as she worked; she was within call of home, and could hear all home sounds with their shrillness softened down. Between her and it, Edward was amusing himself; he often called upon her for sympathy, which she as readily gave.

"I wonder how men make their boats steady; I have taken mine to the pond, and she has toppled over every time I sent her in."

"Has it?—that's very tiresome! Would it do to put a little weight in it, to keep it down?"

"How often must I tell you to call a ship 'her'; and there you will go on saying—'it'—'it'!"

After this correction of his sister, Master Edward did not like the condescension of acknowledging her suggestion to be a good one; so he went silently to the house in search of the requisite ballast; but, not being able to find anything

suitable, he came back to his turfy hillock, littered round with chips of wood, and tried to insert some pebbles into his vessel; but they stuck fast, and he was obliged to ask again.

"Supposing it was a good thing to weight her, what could I put in?"

Maggie thought a moment.

"Would shot do?" asked she.

"It would be the very thing; but where can I get any?"

"There is some that was left of papa's. It is in the right-hand corner of the second drawer of the bureau, wrapped up in a newspaper."

"What a plague! I can't remember your 'seconds,' and 'right-hands,' and fiddle-faddles." He worked on at his pebbles. They would not do.

"I think if you were good-natured, Maggie, you might go for me."

"Oh, Ned; I've all this long seam to do. Mamma said I must finish it before tea; and that I might play a little if I had done it first," said Maggie rather plaintively; for it was a real pain to her to refuse a request.

"It would not take you five minutes."

Maggie thought a little. The time would only be taken out of her playing, which, after all, did not signify; while Edward was really busy about his ship. She rose, and clambered up the steep grassy slope, slippery with the heat.

Before she had found the paper of shot, she heard her mother's voice calling, in a sort of hushed hurried loudness, as if anxious to be heard by one person, yet not by another —"Edward, Edward, come home quickly. Here's Mr. Buxton coming along the Fell Lane; he's coming here, as sure as sixpence; come, Edward, come."

Maggie saw Edward put down his ship and come. At his mother's bidding it certainly was; but he strove to make this as little apparent as he could, by sauntering up the slope, with his hands in his pockets, in a very independent and

négligé style. Maggie had no time to watch longer; for now she was called, too, and downstairs she ran.

"Here, Maggie," said her mother in a nervous hurry; "help Nancy to get a tray ready all in a minute. I do believe here's Mr. Buxton coming to call. Oh, Edward! go and brush your hair, and put on your Sunday jacket; here's Mr. Buxton just coming round. I'll only run up and change my cap; and you say you'll come up and tell me, Nancy; all proper, you know."

"To be sure, ma'am. I've lived in families afore now," said Nancy gruffly.

"Oh, yes, I know you have. Be sure you bring in the cowslip wine. I wish I could have stayed to decant some port."

Nancy and Maggie bustled about, in and out of the kitchen and dairy, and were so deep in their preparations for Mr. Buxton's reception that they were not aware of the very presence of that gentleman himself on the scene. He had found the front door open, as is wont in country places, and had walked in; first stopping at the empty parlour, and then finding his way to the place where voices and sounds proclaimed that there were inhabitants. So he stood there, stooping a little under the low-browed lintels of the kitchen door, and looking large, and red, and warm, but with a pleased and almost amused expression of face.

"Lord bless me, sir! what a start you gave me!" said Nancy, as she suddenly caught sight of him. "I'll go and tell my missus in a minute that you're come."

Off she went, leaving Maggie alone with the great, tall, broad gentleman, smiling at her from his frame in the doorway, but never speaking. She went on dusting a wine-glass most assiduously.

"Well done, little girl," came out a fine strong voice at last. "Now I think that will do. Come and show me the parlour where I may sit down, for I've had a long walk, and am very tired."

Maggie took him into the parlour, which was always cool

and fresh in the hottest weather. It was scented by a great beau-pot filled with roses; and, besides, the casement was open to the fragrant court. Mr. Buxton was so large, and the parlour so small, that when he was once in, Maggie thought, when he went away, he would carry the room on his back, as a snail does its house.

"And so you are a notable little woman, are you?" said he, after he had stretched himself (a very unnecessary proceeding), and unbuttoned his waistcoat. Maggie stood near the door, uncertain whether to go or to stay. "How bright and clean you are making that glass! Do you think you could get me some water to fill it? Mind, it must be that very glass I saw you polishing. I shall know it again."

Maggie was thankful to escape out of the room; and in the passage she met her mother, who had made time to change her gown as well as her cap. Before Nancy would allow the little girl to return with the glass of water, she smoothed her short-cut glossy hair; it was all that was needed to make her look delicately neat. Maggie was conscientious in trying to find out the identical glass; but I am afraid Nancy was not quite so truthful in avouching that one of the six, exactly similar, which were now placed on the tray, was the same she had found on the dresser, when she came back from telling her mistress of Mr. Buxton's arrival.

Maggie carried in the water, with a shy pride in the clearness of the glass. Her mother was sitting on the edge of her chair, speaking in unusually fine language, and with a higher pitched voice than common. Edward, in all his Sunday glory, was standing by Mr. Buxton, looking happy and conscious. But when Maggie came in, Mr. Buxton made room for her between Edward and himself, and, while he went on talking, lifted her on to his knee. She sat there as on a pinnacle of honour; but, as she durst not nestle up to him, a chair would have been the more comfortable seat.

"As founder's line, I have a right of presentation; and

for my dear old friend's sake" (here Mrs. Browne wiped her eyes), "I am truly glad of it; my young friend will have a little form of examination to go through; and then we shall see him carrying every prize before him, I have no doubt. Thank you—just a little of your sparkling cowslip wine. Ah! this gingerbread is like the gingerbread I had when I was a boy. My little lady here must learn the receipt, and make me some. Will she?"

"Speak to Mr. Buxton, child, who is kind to your brother. You will make him some gingerbread, I am sure."

"If I may," said Maggie, hanging down her head.

"Or, I'll tell you what. Suppose you come to my house, and teach us how to make it there; and then, you know, we could always be making gingerbread when we were not eating it. That would be best, I think. Must I ask mamma to bring you down to Combehurst, and let us all get acquainted together? I have a great boy and a little girl at home, who will like to see you, I'm sure. And we have got a pony for you to ride on, and a peacock and guinea fowls, and I don't know what all. Come, madam, let me persuade you. School begins in three weeks. Let us fix a day before then."

"Do, mamma," said Edward.

"I am not in spirits for visiting," Mrs. Browne answered. But the quick children detected a hesitation in her manner of saying the oft-spoken words, and had hopes if only Mr. Buxton would persevere in his invitation.

"Your not visiting is the very reason why you are not in spirits. A little change, and a few neighbourly faces, would do you good, I'll be bound. Besides, for the children's sake you should not live too secluded a life. Young people should see a little of the world."

Mrs. Browne was much obliged to Mr. Buxton for giving her so decent an excuse for following her inclination, which, it must be owned, tended to the acceptance of the invitation. So, "for the children's sake," she consented. But she sighed, as if making a sacrifice.

"That's right," said Mr. Buxton. "Now for the day."

It was fixed that they should go on that day week; and after some further conversation about the school at which Edward was to be placed, and some more jokes about Maggie's notability, and an inquiry if she would come and live with him the next time he wanted a housemaid, Mr. Buxton took his leave.

His visit had been an event, and they made no great attempt at settling again that day to any of their usual employments. In the first place, Nancy came in to hear and discuss all the proposed plans. Ned, who was uncertain whether to like or dislike the prospect of school, was very much offended by the old servant's remark, on first hearing of the project.

"It's time for him. He'll learn his place there, which, it strikes me, he and others too are apt to forget at home."

Then followed discussions and arrangements respecting his clothes. And then they came to the plan of spending a day at Mr. Buxton's, which Mrs. Browne was rather shy of mentioning, having a sort of an idea of inconstancy and guilt connected with the thought of mingling with the world again. However, Nancy approved: "It was quite right," and "just as it should be," and "good for the children."

"Yes; it was on their account I did it, Nancy," said Mrs. Browne.

"How many children has Mr. Buxton?" asked Edward.

"Only one—Frank, I think they call him. But you must say Master Buxton; be sure."

"Who is that little girl, then," asked Maggie, "who sits with them in church?"

"Oh! that's little Miss Harvey, his niece, and a great fortune."

"They do say he never forgave her mother till the day of her death," remarked Nancy.

"Then they tell stories, Nancy!" replied Mrs. Browne (it was she herself who had said it; but that was before Mr. Buxton's call). "For d'ye think his sister would have

left him guardian to her child if they were not on good terms?"

"Well! I only know what folks say. And, for sure, he took a spite at Mr. Harvey for no reason on earth; and every one knows he never spoke to him."

"He speaks very kindly and pleasantly," put in Maggie.

"Ay; and I'm not saying but what he is a very good, kind man in the main. But he has his whims, and keeps hold on 'em when he's got 'em. There's them pies burning, and I'm talking here!"

When Nancy had returned to her kitchen, Mrs. Browne called Maggie upstairs, to examine what clothes would be needed for Edward. And when they were up she tried on the black satin gown, which had been her visiting dress ever since she was married, and which she intended should replace the old, worn-out bombazine on the day of the visit to Combehurst.

"For Mrs. Buxton is a real born lady," said she; "and I should like to be well dressed, to do her honour."

"I did not know there was a Mrs. Buxton," said Maggie. "She is never at church."

"No; she is but delicate and weakly, and never leaves the house. I think her maid told me she never left her room now."

The Buxton family, root and branch, formed the *pièce de résistance* in the conversation between Mrs. Browne and her children for the next week. As the day drew near, Maggie almost wished to stay at home, so impressed was she with the awfulness of the visit. Edward felt bold in the idea of a new suit of clothes, which had been ordered for the occasion, and for school afterwards. Mrs. Browne remembered having heard the rector say, "A woman never looked so ladylike as when she wore black satin," and kept her spirits up with that observation; but when she saw how worn it was at the elbows, she felt rather depressed, and unequal to visiting. Still, for her children's sake, she would do much.

After her long day's work was ended, Nancy sat up at

her sewing. She had found out that among all the preparations, none were going on for Margaret; and she had used her influence over her mistress (who half-liked, and half-feared, and entirely depended upon her) to obtain from her an old gown, which she had taken to pieces, and washed and scoured, and was now making up, in a way a little old-fashioned, to be sure; but, on the whole, it looked so nice when completed and put on, that Mrs. Browne gave Maggie a strict lecture about taking great care of such a handsome frock, and forgot that she had considered the gown from which it had been made as worn out and done for.

CHAPTER II

At length they were dressed, and Nancy stood on the court-steps, shading her eyes, and looking after them, as they climbed the heathery slope leading to Combehurst.

"I wish she'd take her hand sometimes, just to let her know the feel of her mother's hand. Perhaps she will, at least after Master Edward goes to school."

As they went along, Mrs. Browne gave the children a few rules respecting manners and etiquette.

"Maggie! you must sit as upright as ever you can; make your back flat, child, and don't poke. If I cough, you must draw up. I shall cough whenever I see you do anything wrong, and I shall be looking at you all day; so remember. You hold yourself very well, Edward. If Mr. Buxton asks you, you may have a glass of wine, because you're a boy. But mind and say, 'Your good health, sir,' before you drink it."

"I'd rather not have the wine if I'm to say that," said Edward bluntly.

"Oh, nonsense, my dear. You'd wish to be like a gentleman, I'm sure."

Edward muttered something which was inaudible. His mother went on—

"Of course you'll never think of being helped more than twice. Twice of meat, twice of pudding, is the genteel thing. You may take less, but never more."

"Oh, mamma! how beautiful Combehurst spire is, with that dark cloud behind it!" exclaimed Maggie, as they came in sight of the town.

"You've no business with Combehurst spire when I'm speaking to you. I'm talking myself out of breath to teach you how to behave, and there you go looking after clouds, and such-like rubbish. I'm ashamed of you."

Although Maggie walked quietly by her mother's side all the rest of the way, Mrs. Browne was too much offended to resume her instructions on good-breeding. Maggie might be helped three times if she liked: she had done with her.

They were very early. When they drew near the bridge, they were met by a tall, fine-looking boy, leading a beautiful little Shetland pony, with a side-saddle on it. He came up to Mrs. Browne, and addressed her—

"My father thought your little girl would be tired, and he told me to bring my cousin Erminia's pony for her. It's as quiet as can be."

Now this was rather provoking to Mrs. Browne, as she chose to consider Maggie in disgrace. However, there was no help for it: all she could do was to spoil the enjoyment as far as possible, by looking and speaking in a cold manner, which often chilled Maggie's little heart, and took all the zest out of the pleasure now. It was in vain that Frank Buxton made the pony trot and canter; she still looked sad and grave.

"Little dull thing!" he thought; but he was as kind and considerate as a gentlemanly boy could be.

At last they reached Mr. Buxton's house. It was in the main street, and the front door opened upon it by a flight of

steps. Wide on each side extended the stone-coped windows. It was in reality a mansion, and needed not the neighbouring contrast of the cottages on either side to make it look imposing. When they went in, they entered a large hall, cool even on that burning July day, with a black and white flag floor, and old settees round the walls, and great jars of curious china, which were filled with pot-pourri. The dusky gloom was pleasant, after the glare of the street outside; and the requisite light and cheerfulness were given by the peep into the garden, framed, as it were, by the large doorway that opened into it. There were roses, and sweet peas, and poppies—a rich mass of colour, which looked well, set in the somewhat sombre coolness of the hall. All the house told of wealth—wealth which had accumulated for generations, and which was shown in a sort of comfortable, grand, unostentatious way. Mr. Buxton's ancestors had been yeomen; but two or three generations back they might, if ambitious, have taken their place as county gentry, so much had the value of their property increased, and so great had been the amount of their savings. They, however, continued to live in the old farm, till Mr. Buxton's grandfather built the house in Combehurst of which I am speaking, and then he felt rather ashamed of what he had done; it seemed like stepping out of his position. He and his wife always sat in the best kitchen, and it was only after his son's marriage that the entertaining rooms were furnished. Even then they were kept with closed shutters and bagged-up furniture during the lifetime of the old couple, who, nevertheless, took a pride in adding to the rich-fashioned ornaments and grand old china of the apartments. But they died, and were gathered to their fathers, and young Mr. and Mrs. Buxton (aged respectively fifty-one and forty-five) reigned in their stead. They had the good taste to make no sudden change, but gradually the rooms assumed an inhabited appearance, and their son and daughter grew up in the enjoyment of great wealth, and no small degree of refinement. But as yet they held back modestly from putting

themselves in any way on a level with the county people. Lawrence Buxton was sent to the same school as his father had been before him; and the notion of his going to college to complete his education was, after some deliberation, negatived. In process of time he succeeded his father, and married a sweet, gentle lady, of a decayed and very poor county family, by whom he had one boy before she fell into delicate health. His sister had married a man whose character was worse than his fortune, and had been left a widow. Everybody thought her husband's death a blessing; but she loved him, in spite of negligence and many grosser faults: and so, not many years after, she died, leaving her little daughter to her brother's care, with many a broken-voiced entreaty that he would never speak a word against the dead father of her child. So the little Erminia was taken home by her self-reproaching uncle, who felt now how hardly he had acted towards his sister in breaking off all communication with her on her ill-starred marriage.

"Where is Erminia, Frank?" asked his father, speaking over Maggie's shoulder, while he still held her hand. "I want to take Mrs. Browne to your mother. I told Erminia to be here to welcome this little girl."

"I'll take her to Minnie; I think she's in the garden. I'll come back to you," nodding to Edward, "directly, and then we will go to the rabbits."

So Frank and Maggie left the great lofty room, full of strange, rare things, and rich with books, and went into the sunny, scented garden, which stretched far and wide behind the house. Down one of the walks, with a hedge of roses on either side, came a little tripping fairy, with long golden ringlets, and a complexion like a china rose. With the deep blue of the summer sky behind her, Maggie thought she looked like an angel. She neither hastened nor slackened her pace when she saw them, but came on with the same dainty light prancing step.

"Make haste, Minnie," cried Frank.

But Minnie stopped to gather a rose.

"Don't stay with me," said Maggie softly, although she had held his hand like that of a friend, and did not feel that the little fairy's manner was particularly cordial or gracious. Frank took her at her word, and ran off to Edward.

Erminia came a little quicker when she saw that Maggie was left alone; but for some time after they were together, they had nothing to say to each other. Erminia was easily impressed by the pomps and vanities of the world, and Maggie's new handsome frock seemed to her made of old ironed brown silk. And though Maggie's voice was soft, with a silver, ringing sound in it, she pronounced her words in Nancy's broad, country way. Her hair was cut short all round, her shoes were thick, and clumped as she walked. Erminia patronized her, and thought herself very kind and condescending, but they were not particularly friendly. The visit promised to be more honourable than agreeable, and Maggie almost wished herself at home again. Dinner-time came. Mrs. Buxton dined in her own room. Mr. Buxton was hearty, and jovial, and pressing; he almost scolded Maggie because she would not take more than twice of his favourite pudding; but she remembered what her mother had said, and that she would be watched all day; and this gave her a little prim, quaint manner, very different from her usual soft, charming unconsciousness. She fancied that Edward and Master Buxton were just as little at their ease with each other as she and Miss Harvey. Perhaps this feeling on the part of the boys made all four children unite after dinner.

"Let us go to the swing in the shrubbery," said Frank, after a little consideration: and off they ran. Frank proposed that he and Edward should swing the two little girls; and for a time all went on very well. But by-and-by Edward thought that Maggie had had enough, and that he should like a turn, and Maggie, at his first word, got out.

"Don't you like swinging?" asked Erminia.

"Yes! but Edward would like it now." And Edward accordingly took her place. Frank turned away and would

not swing him. Maggie strove hard to do it, but he was heavy, and the swing bent unevenly. He scolded her for what she could not help, and at last jumped out so roughly, that the seat hit Maggie's face, and knocked her down. When she got up, her lips quivered with pain, but she did not cry; she only looked anxiously at her frock. There was a great rent across the front breadth. Then she did shed tears, tears of fright. What would her mother say?

Erminia saw her crying.

"Are you hurt?" said she kindly. "Oh, how your cheek is swelled! What a rude, cross boy your brother is!"

"I did not know he was going to jump out. I am not crying because I am hurt, but because of this great rent in my nice new frock. Mamma will be so displeased."

"Is it a new frock?" asked Erminia.

"It is a new one for me. Nancy had sat up several nights to make it. Oh! what shall I do?"

Erminia's little heart was softened by such excessive poverty. A best frock made of shabby old silk! She put her arms round Maggie's neck and said—

"Come with me; we will go to my aunt's dressing-room, and Dawson will give me some silk, and I'll help you to mend it."

"That's a kind little Minnie," said Frank. Ned had turned sulkily away. I do not think the boys were ever cordial again that day; for, as Frank said to his mother, "Ned might have said he was sorry; but he is a regular tyrant to that little brown mouse of a sister of his."

Erminia and Maggie went, with their arms round each other's necks, to Mrs. Buxton's dressing-room. The misfortune had made them friends. Mrs. Buxton lay on the sofa; so fair and white and colourless, in her muslin dressing-gown, that when Maggie first saw the lady lying with her eyes shut, her heart gave a start, for she thought she was dead. But she opened her large, languid eyes, and called them to her, and listened to their story with interest.

"Dawson is at tea. Look, Minnie, in my workbox;

there is some silk there. Take off your frock, my dear, and bring it here, and let me see how it can be mended."

"Aunt Buxton," whispered Erminia, "do let me give her one of my frocks. This is such an old thing."

"No, love. I'll tell you why afterwards," answered Mrs. Buxton.

She looked at the rent, and arranged it nicely for the little girls to mend. Erminia helped Maggie with right goodwill. As they sat on the floor, Mrs. Buxton thought what a pretty contrast they made; Erminia, dazzlingly fair, with her golden ringlets and her pale-blue frock: Maggie's little round white shoulders peeping out of her petticoat; her brown hair as glossy and smooth as the nuts that it resembled in colour; her long black eye-lashes drooping over her clear, smooth cheek, which would have given the idea of delicacy, but for the coral lips that spoke of perfect health; and when she glanced up, she showed long, liquid, dark-grey eyes. The deep red of the curtain behind threw out these two little figures well.

Dawson came up. She was a grave, elderly person, of whom Erminia was far more afraid than she was of her aunt; but at Mrs. Buxton's desire she finished mending the frock for Maggie.

"Mr. Buxton has asked some of your mamma's old friends to tea, as I am not able to go down. But I think, Dawson, I must have these two little girls to tea with me. Can you be very quiet, my dears, or shall you think it dull?"

They gladly accepted the invitation; and Erminia promised all sorts of fanciful promises as to quietness; and went about on her tiptoes in such a laboured manner, that Mrs. Buxton begged her at last not to try and be quiet, as she made much less noise when she did not. It was the happiest part of the day to Maggie. Something in herself was so much in harmony with Mrs. Buxton's sweet resigned gentleness, that it answered like an echo, and the two understood each other strangely well. They seemed like old friends. Maggie, who was reserved at home because no

one cared to hear what she had to say, opened out, and told Erminia and Mrs. Buxton all about her way of spending her day, and described her home.

"How odd!" said Erminia. "I have ridden that way on Abd-el-Kadr, and never seen your house."

"It is like the place the Sleeping Beauty lived in; people sometimes seem to go round it and round it, and never find it. But unless you follow a little sheep-track, which seems to end at a grey piece of rock, you may come within a stone's throw of the chimneys and never see them. I think you would think it so pretty. Do you ever come that way, ma'am?"

"No, love," answered Mrs. Buxton.

"But will you some time?"

"I am afraid I shall never be able to go out again," said Mrs. Buxton, in a voice which, though low, was very cheerful. Maggie thought how sad a lot was here before her; and by-and-by she took a little stool, and sat by Mrs. Buxton's sofa, and stole her hands into hers.

Mrs. Browne was in full tide of pride and happiness downstairs. Mr. Buxton had a number of jokes, which would have become dull from repetition (for he worked a merry idea threadbare before he would let it go) had it not been for his jovial blandness and good-nature. He liked to make people happy, and, as far as bodily wants went, he had a quick perception of what was required. He sat like a king (for, excepting the rector, there was not another gentleman of his standing at Combehurst), among six or seven ladies, who laughed merrily at all his sayings, and evidently thought Mrs. Browne had been highly honoured in having been asked to dinner as well as to tea. In the evening, the carriage was ordered to take her as far as a carriage could go; and there was a little mysterious hand-shaking between her host and herself on taking leave, which made her very curious for the lights of home by which to examine a bit of rustling paper that had been put in her hand with some stammered-out words about Edward.

When every one had gone, there was a little gathering in Mrs. Buxton's dressing-room. Husband, son, and niece, all came to give her their opinions on the day and the visitors.

"Good Mrs. Browne is a little tiresome," said Mr. Buxton, yawning. "Living in that moorland hole, I suppose. However, I think she has enjoyed her day; and we'll ask her down now and then, for Browne's sake. Poor Browne! what a good man he was!"

"I don't like that boy at all," said Frank. "I beg you'll not ask him again while I'm at home: he is so selfish and self-important; and yet he's a bit snobbish now and then. Mother! I know what you mean by that look. Well! if I am self-important sometimes, I'm not a snob."

"Little Maggie is very nice," said Erminia. "What a pity she has not a new frock! Was not she good about it, Frank, when she tore it?"

"Yes, she's a nice little thing enough, if she does not get all spirit cowed out of her by that brother. I'm thankful that he is going to school."

When Mrs. Browne heard where Maggie had drank tea, she was offended. She had only sat with Mrs. Buxton for an hour before dinner. If Mrs. Buxton could bear the noise of children, she could not think why she shut herself up in that room, and gave herself such airs. She supposed it was because she was the grand-daughter of Sir Henry Biddulph that she took upon herself to have such whims, and not sit at the head of her table, or make tea for her company in a civil, decent way. Poor Mr. Buxton! What a sad life for a merry, light-hearted man to have such a wife! It was a good thing for him to have agreeable society sometimes. She thought he looked a deal better for seeing his friends. He must be sadly moped with that sickly wife.

(If she had been clairvoyante at that moment, she might have seen Mr. Buxton tenderly chafing his wife's hands, and feeling in his innermost soul a wonder how one so saint-like could ever have learnt to love such a boor as he was; it was

the wonderful mysterious blessing of his life. So little do we know of the inner truths of the households, where we come and go like intimate guests!)

Maggie could not bear to hear Mrs. Buxton spoken of as a fine lady assuming illness. Her heart beat hard as she spoke. "Mamma! I am sure she is really ill. Her lips kept going so white; and her hand so burning hot all the time that I held it."

"Have you been holding Mrs. Buxton's hand? Where were your manners? You are a little forward creature, and ever were. But don't pretend to know better than your elders. It is no use telling me Mrs. Buxton is ill, and she able to bear the noise of children."

"I think they are all a pack of set-up people, and that Frank Buxton is the worst of all," said Edward.

Maggie's heart sank within her to hear this cold unkind way of talking over the friends who had done so much to make their day happy. She had never before ventured into the world, and did not know how common and universal is the custom of picking to pieces those with whom we have just been associating; and so it pained her. She was a little depressed too, with the idea that she should never see Mrs. Buxton and the lovely Erminia again. Because no future visit or intercourse had been spoken about, she fancied it would never take place; and she felt like the man in the Arabian Nights, who caught a glimpse of the precious stones and dazzling glories of the cavern, which was immediately after closed, and shut up into the semblance of hard, barren rock. She tried to recall the house. Deep blue, crimson red, warm brown draperies, were so striking after the light chintzes of her own house; and the effect of a suite of rooms opening out of each other was something quite new to the little girl; the apartments seemed to melt away into vague distance, like the dim endings of the arched aisles in church. But most of all she tried to recall Mrs. Buxton's face; and Nancy had at last to put away her work, and come to bed, in order to soothe the poor child, who was

crying at the thought that Mrs. Buxton would soon die, and that she should never see her again. Nancy loved Maggie dearly, and felt no jealousy of this warm admiration of the unknown lady. She listened to her story and her fears till the sobs were hushed; and the moon fell through the casement on the white closed eyelids of one who still sighed in her sleep.

CHAPTER III

In three weeks, the day came for Edward's departure. A great cake and a parcel of gingerbread soothed his sorrows on leaving home.

"Don't cry, Maggie!" said he to her on the last morning; "you see I don't. Christmas will soon be here, and I dare say I shall find time to write to you now and then. Did Nancy put any citron in the cake?"

Maggie wished she might accompany her mother to Combehurst to see Edward off by the coach; but it was not to be. She went with them, without her bonnet, as far as her mother would allow her; and then she sat down, and watched their progress for a long, long way. She was startled by the sound of a horse's feet, softly trampling through the long heather. It was Frank Buxton's.

"My father thought Mrs. Browne would like to see the *Woodchester Herald*. Is Edward gone?" said he, noticing her sad face.

"Yes; he is just gone down the hill to the coach. I dare say you can see him crossing the bridge, soon. I did so want to have gone with him," answered she, looking wistfully towards the town.

Frank felt sorry for her, left alone to gaze after her brother, whom, strange as it was, she evidently regretted. After a minute's silence he said—

"You liked riding the other day. Would you like a ride now? Rhoda is very gentle, if you can sit on my saddle. Look; I'll shorten the stirrup. There now; there's a brave little girl! I'll lead her very carefully. Why, Erminia durst not ride without a side-saddle! I'll tell you what; I'll bring the newspaper every Wednesday till I go to school, and you shall have a ride. Only I wish we had a side-saddle for Rhoda. Or, if Erminia will let me, I'll bring Abd-el-Kadr, the little Shetland you rode the other day."

"But will Mr. Buxton let you?" asked Maggie, half-delighted—half-afraid.

"Oh, my father! to be sure he will. I have him in very good order."

Maggie was rather puzzled by this way of speaking.

"When do you go to school?" asked she.

"Towards the end of August; I don't know the day."

"Does Erminia go to school?"

"No; I believe she will soon, though, if mamma does not get better." Maggie liked the change of voice, as he spoke of his mother.

"There! little lady! now jump down. Famous! you've a deal of spirit, you little brown mouse."

Nancy came out, with a wondering look, to receive Maggie.

"It is Mr. Frank Buxton," said she, by way of an introduction. "He has brought mamma the newspaper."

"Will you walk in, sir, and rest? I can tie up your horse."

"No, thank you," said he. "I must be off. Don't forget, little Mousey, that you are to be ready for another ride next Wednesday." And away he went.

It needed a good deal of Nancy's diplomacy to procure Maggie this pleasure: although I don't know why Mrs. Browne should have denied it, for the circle they went was always within sight of the knoll in front of the house, if any one cared enough about the matter to mount it, and look after them. Frank and Maggie got great friends in these

rides. Her fearlessness delighted and surprised him, she had seemed so cowed and timid at first. But she was only so with people, as he found out before his holidays ended. He saw her shrink from particular looks and inflexions of voice of her mother's; and learnt to read them, and dislike Mrs. Browne accordingly, notwithstanding all her sugary manner towards himself. The result of his observations he communicated to his mother, and, in consequence, he was the bearer of a most civil and ceremonious message from Mrs. Buxton to Mrs. Browne, to the effect that the former would be much obliged to the latter if she would allow Maggie to ride down occasionally with the groom, who would bring the newspapers on the Wednesdays (now Frank was going to school), and to spend the afternoon with Erminia. Mrs. Browne consented, proud of the honour, and yet a little annoyed that no mention was made of herself. When Frank had bid "good-bye," and fairly disappeared, she turned to Maggie.

"You must not set yourself up if you go amongst these fine folks. It is their way of showing attention to your father and myself. And you must mind and work doubly hard on Thursdays to make up for playing on Wednesdays."

Maggie was in a flush of sudden colour, and a happy palpitation of her fluttering little heart. She could hardly feel any sorrow that the kind Frank was going away, so brimful was she of the thoughts of seeing his mother; who had grown strangely associated in her dreams, both sleeping and waking, with the still calm marble effigies that lay for ever clasping their hands in prayer on the altar-tombs in Combehurst Church. All the week was one happy season of anticipation. She was afraid her mother was secretly irritated at her natural rejoicing; and so she did not speak to her about it, but she kept awake till Nancy came to bed, and poured into her sympathising ears every detail, real or imaginary, of her past or future intercourse with Mrs. Buxton. And the old servant listened with interest, and

fell into the custom of picturing the future with the ease and simplicity of a child.

"Suppose, Nancy, only suppose you know, that she did die. I don't mean really die, but go into a trance like death; she looked as if she was in one when I first saw her. I would not leave her, but I would sit by her, and watch her, and watch her."

"Her lips would be always fresh and red," interrupted Nancy.

"Yes, I know; you've told me before how they keep red—I should look at them quite steadily; I would try never to go to sleep."

"The great thing would be to have air-holes left in the coffin." But Nancy felt the little girl creep close to her at the grim suggestion, and, with the tact of love, she changed the subject.

"Or supposing we could hear of a doctor who could charm away illness. There were such in my young days; but I don't think people are so knowledgeable now. Peggy Jackson, that lived near us when I was a girl, was cured of a waste by a charm."

"What is a waste, Nancy?"

"It is just a pining away. Food does not nourish, nor drink strengthen them, but they just fade off, and grow thinner and thinner, till their shadow looks grey instead of black at noonday; but he cured her in no time by a charm."

"Oh, if we could find him."

"Lass, he's dead, and she's dead too, long ago."

While Maggie was in imagination going over moor and fell, into the hollows of the distant mysterious hills, where she imagined all strange beasts and weird people to haunt, she fell asleep.

Such were the fanciful thoughts which were engendered in the little girl's mind by her secluded and solitary life. It was more solitary than ever, now that Edward was gone to school. The house missed his loud, cheerful voice, and bursting presence. There seemed much less to be done,

now that his numerous wants no longer called for ministration and attendance. Maggie did her task of work on her own grey rock; but as it was sooner finished, now that he was not there to interrupt and call her off, she used to stray up the Fell Lane at the back of the house—a little steep, stony lane, more like stairs cut in the rock than what we, in the level land, call a lane; it reached on to the wide and open moor, and near its termination there was a knotted thorn-tree, the only tree for apparent miles. Here the sheep crouched under the storms, or stood and shaded themselves in the noontide heat. The ground was brown with their cleft round foot-marks; and tufts of wool were hung on the lower part of the stem, like votive offerings on some shrine. Here Maggie used to come and sit and dream in any scarce half-hour of leisure. Here she came to cry, when her little heart was over-full at her mother's sharp fault-finding, or when bidden to keep out of the way, and not be troublesome. She used to look over the swelling expanse of moor, and the tears were dried up by the soft low-blowing wind which came sighing along it. She forgot her little home griefs to wonder why a brown-purple shadow always streaked one particular part in the fullest sunlight; why the cloud-shadows always seemed to be wafted with a sidelong motion; or she would imagine what lay beyond those old grey holy hills, which seemed to bear up the white clouds of heaven on which the angels flew abroad. Or she would look straight up through the quivering air, as long as she could bear its white dazzling, to try and see God's throne in that unfathomable and infinite depth of blue. She thought she should see it blaze forth sudden and glorious, if she were but full of faith. She always came down from the thorn comforted, and meekly gentle.

But there was danger of the child becoming dreamy, and finding her pleasure in life in reverie, not in action, or endurance, or the holy rest which comes after both, and prepares for further striving or bearing. Mrs. Buxton's kindness prevented this danger just in time. It was partly out of

interest in Maggie, but also partly to give Erminia a companion, that she wished the former to come down to Combehurst.

When she was on these visits, she received no regular instruction; and yet all the knowledge, and most of the strength of her character, was derived from these occasional hours. It is true her mother had given her daily lessons in reading, writing, and arithmetic; but both teacher and taught felt these more as painful duties to be gone through than understood them as means to an end. The "There, child! now that's done with," of relief, from Mrs. Browne, was heartily echoed in Maggie's breast, as the dull routine was concluded.

Mrs. Buxton did not make a set labour of teaching. I suppose she felt that much was learned from her superintendence, but she never thought of doing or saying anything with a latent idea of its indirect effect upon the little girls, her companions. She was simply, herself; she even confessed (where the confession was called for) to shortcomings, to faults, and never denied the force of temptations, either of those which beset little children, or of those which occasionally assailed herself. Pure, simple, and truthful to the heart's core, her life, in its uneventful hours and days, spoke many homilies. Maggie, who was grave, imaginative, and somewhat quaint, took pains in finding words to express the thoughts to which her solitary life had given rise, secure of Mrs. Buxton's ready understanding and sympathy.

"You are so like a cloud," said she to Mrs. Buxton. "Up at the thorn-tree, it was quite curious how the clouds used to shape themselves, just according as I was glad or sorry. I have seen the same clouds, that, when I came up first, looked like a heap of little snow-hillocks over babies' graves, turn, as soon as I grew happier, to a sort of long bright row of angels. And you seem always to have had some sorrow when I am sad, and to turn bright and hopeful as soon as I grow glad. Dear Mrs. Buxton! I wish Nancy knew you."

The gay, volatile, wilful, warm-hearted Erminia was less earnest in all things. Her childhood had been passed amid the distractions of wealth; and passionately bent upon the attainment of some object at one moment, the next found her angry at being reminded of the vanished anxiety she had shown but a moment before. Her life was a shattered mirror; every part dazzling and brilliant, but wanting the coherency and perfection of a whole. Mrs. Buxton strove to bring her to a sense of the beauty of completeness, and the relation which qualities and objects bear to each other: but in all her striving she retained hold of the golden clue of sympathy. She would enter into Erminia's eagerness, if the object of it varied twenty times a day; but, by-and-by, in her own mild, sweet, suggestive way, she would place all these objects in their right and fitting places, as they were worthy of desire. I do not know how it was, but all discords and disordered fragments seemed to fall into harmony and order before her presence.

She had no wish to make the two little girls into the same kind of pattern character. They were diverse as the lily and the rose. But she tried to give stability and earnestness to Erminia; while she aimed to direct Maggie's imagination, so as to make it a great minister to high ends, instead of simply contributing to the vividness and duration of a reverie.

She told her tales of saints and martyrs, and all holy heroines, who forgot themselves, and strove only to be "ministers of Him, to do His pleasure." The tears glistened in the eyes of hearer and speaker, while she spoke in her low, faint voice, which was almost choked at times when she came to the noblest part of all.

But when she found that Maggie was in danger of becoming too little a dweller in the present, from the habit of anticipating the occasion for some great heroic action, she spoke of other heroines. She told her how, though the lives of these women of old were only known to us through some striking glorious deed, they yet must have built up the

temple of their perfection by many noiseless stories; how, by small daily offerings laid on the altar, they must have obtained their beautiful strength for the crowning sacrifice. And then she would turn and speak of those whose names will never be blazoned on earth—some poor maid-servant, or hard-worked artisan, or weary governess—who have gone on through life quietly, with holy purposes in their hearts, to which they gave up pleasure and ease, in a soft, still, succession of resolute days. She quoted those lines of George Herbert's—

> "All may have,
> If they dare choose, a glorious life, or grave."

And Maggie's mother was disappointed because Mrs. Buxton had never offered to teach her "to play on the piano," which was to her the very head and front of a genteel education. Maggie, in all her time of yearning to become Joan of Arc, or some great heroine, was unconscious that she herself showed no little heroism in bearing meekly what she did every day from her mother. It was hard to be questioned about Mrs. Buxton, and then to have her answers turned into subjects for contempt and fault-finding with that sweet lady's ways.

When Ned came home for the holidays, he had much to tell. His mother listened for hours to his tales; and proudly marked all that she could note of his progress in learning. His copy-books and writing-flourishes were a sight to behold; and his account-books contained towers and pyramids of figures.

"Ay, ay!" said Mr. Buxton, when they were shown to him; "this is grand! when I was a boy I could make a flying eagle with one stroke of my pen, but I never could do all this. And yet I thought myself a fine fellow, I warrant you. And these sums! why, man, I must make you my agent. I need one, I'm sure; for though I get an accountant every two or three years to do up my books, they somehow have the knack of getting wrong again. Those quarries,

Mrs. Browne, which every one says are so valuable, and for the stone out of which I receive orders amounting to hundreds of pounds, what d'ye think was the profit I made last year, according to my books?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir; something very great, I've no doubt."

"Just sevenpence three farthings," said he, bursting into a fit of merry laughter, such as another man would have kept for the announcement of enormous profits. "But I must manage things differently soon. Frank will want money when he goes to Oxford, and he shall have it. I'm but a rough sort of fellow, but Frank shall take his place as a gentleman. Aha, Miss Maggie! and where's my gingerbread? There you go, creeping up to Mrs. Buxton on a Wednesday, and have never taught cook how to make gingerbread yet. Well, Ned! and how are the classics going on? Fine fellow, that Virgil! Let me see, how does it begin?

'Arma virumque cano, Trojæ qui primus ab oris.'"

"That's pretty well, I think, considering I've never opened him since I left school, thirty years ago. To be sure, I spent six hours a day at it when I was there. Come, now, I'll puzzle you. Can you construe this?

'Infir dealis, inoak noneis; inmud celis, inclay noneis.'"

"To be sure I can," said Edward, with a little contempt in his tone. "Can you do this, sir?

'Apud in is almi des ire,
Mimis tres i neve require,
Alo veri findit a gestis,
His miseri ne ver at restis.'"

But though Edward had made much progress, and gained three prizes, his moral training had been little attended to. He was more tyrannical than ever, both to his mother and Maggie. It was a drawn battle between him and Nancy, and they kept aloof from each other as much as possible.

Maggie fell into her old humble way of submitting to his will, as long as it did not go against her conscience; but that, being daily enlightened by her habits of pious aspiring thought, would not allow her to be so utterly obedient as formerly. In addition to his imperiousness, he had learned to affix the idea of cleverness to various artifices and subterfuges, which utterly revolted her by their meanness.

"You are so set up, by being intimate with Erminia, that you won't do a thing I tell you; you're as selfish and self-willed as"—— he made a pause. Maggie was ready to cry.

"I will do anything, Ned, that is right."

"Well, and I tell you this is right."

"How can it be?" said she sadly, almost wishing to be convinced.

"How—why, it is, and that's enough for you. You must always have a reason for everything now. You're not half so nice as you were. Unless one chops logic with you, and convinces you by a long argument, you'll do nothing. Be obedient, I tell you. That is what a woman has to be."

"I could be obedient to some people, without knowing their reasons, even though they told me to do silly things," said Maggie, half to herself.

"I should like to know to whom," said Edward scornfully.

"To Don Quixote," answered she seriously; for, indeed, he was present in her mind just then, and his noble, tender, melancholy character had made a strong impression there.

Edward stared at her for a moment, and then burst into a loud fit of laughter. It had the good effect of restoring him to a better frame of mind. He had such an excellent joke against his sister, that he could not be angry with her. He called her Sancho Panza all the rest of the holidays, though she protested against it, saying she could not bear the squire, and disliked being called by his name.

Frank and Edward seemed to have a mutual antipathy

to each other, and the coldness between them was rather increased than diminished by all Mr. Buxton's efforts to bring them together. "Come, Frank, my lad!" said he, "don't be so stiff with Ned. His father was a dear friend of mine, and I've set my heart on seeing you friends. You'll have it in your power to help him on in the world."

But Frank answered, "He is not quite honourable, sir. I can't bear a boy who is not quite honourable. Boys brought up at those private schools are so full of tricks!"

"Nay, my lad, there thou'rt wrong. I was brought up at a private school, and no one can say I ever dirtied my hands with a trick in my life. Good old Mr. Thompson would have flogged the life out of a boy who did anything mean or underhand."

CHAPTER IV

Summers and winters came and went, with little to mark them, except the growth of the trees, and the quiet progress of young creatures. Erminia was sent to school somewhere in France, to receive more regular instruction than she could have in the house with her invalid aunt. But she came home once a year, more lovely and elegant and dainty than ever; and Maggie thought, with truth, that ripening years were softening down her volatility, and that her aunt's dew-like sayings had quietly sunk deep, and fertilised the soil. That aunt was fading away. Maggie's devotion added materially to her happiness; and both she and Maggie never forgot that this devotion was to be in all things subservient to the duty which she owed to her mother.

"My love," Mrs. Buxton had more than once said, "you must always recollect that your first duty is towards your mother. You know how glad I am to see you; but I shall

always understand how it is, if you do not come. She may often want you when neither you nor I can anticipate it."

Mrs. Browne had no great wish to keep Maggie at home, though she liked to grumble at her going. Still she felt that it was best, in every way, to keep on good terms with such valuable friends; and she appreciated, in some small degree, the advantage which her intimacy at the house was to Maggie. But yet she could not restrain a few complaints, nor withhold from her, on her return, a recapitulation of all the things which might have been done if she had only been at home, and the number of times that she had been wanted; but when she found that Maggie quietly gave up her next Wednesday's visit as soon as she was made aware of any necessity for her presence at home, her mother left off grumbling, and took little or no notice of her absence.

When the time came for Edward to leave school, he announced that he had no intention of taking orders, but meant to become an attorney.

"It's such slow work," said he to his mother. "One toils away for four or five years, and then one gets a curacy of seventy pounds a year, and no end of work to do for the money. Now the work is not much harder in a lawyer's office, and if one has one's wits about one, there are hundreds and thousands a year to be picked up with mighty little trouble."

Mrs. Browne was very sorry for this determination. She had a great desire to see her son a clergyman, like his father. She did not consider whether his character was fitted for so sacred an office; she rather thought that the profession itself, when once assumed, would purify the character; but, in fact, his fitness or unfitness for holy orders entered little into her mind. She had a respect for the profession, and his father had belonged to it.

"I had rather see you a curate at seventy pounds a year, than an attorney with seven hundred," replied she. "And you know your father was always asked to dine everywhere —to places where I know they would not have asked Mr.

Bish, of Woodchester; and he makes his thousand a year. Besides, Mr. Buxton has the next presentation to Combehurst, and you would stand a good chance for your father's sake. And in the meantime you should live here, if your curacy was any way near."

"I dare say! Catch me burying myself here again. My dear mother, it's a very respectable place for you and Maggie to live in, and I dare say you don't find it dull; but the idea of my quietly sitting down here is something too absurd!"

"Papa did, and was very happy," said Maggie.

"Yes; after he had been at Oxford," replied Edward, a little nonplussed by this reference to one whose memory even the most selfish and thoughtless must have held in respect.

"Well; and you know you would have to go to Oxford first."

"Maggie! I wish you would not interfere between my mother and me. I want to have it settled and done with, and that it will never be if you keep meddling. Now, mother, don't you see how much better it will be for me to go into Mr. Bish's office? Harry Bish has spoken to his father about it."

Mrs. Browne sighed.

"What will Mr. Buxton say?" asked she dolefully.

"Say! Why, don't you see it was he who first put it into my head, by telling me, that first Christmas holidays, that I should be his agent. That would be something, would it not? Harry Bish says he thinks a thousand a year might be made of it."

His loud, decided, rapid talking overpowered Mrs. Browne; but she resigned herself to his wishes with more regret than she had ever done before. It was not the first case in which fluent declamation has taken the place of argument.

Edward was articled to Mr. Bish, and thus gained his point. There was no one with power to resist his wishes,

except his mother and Mr. Buxton. The former had long acknowledged her son's will as her law; and the latter, though surprised and almost disappointed at a change of purpose which he had never anticipated in his plans for Edward's benefit, gave his consent, and even advanced some of the money requisite for the premium.

Maggie looked upon this change with mingled feelings. She had always from a child pictured Edward to herself as taking her father's place. When she had thought of him as a man, it was as contemplative, grave, and gentle, as she remembered her father. With all a child's deficiency of reasoning power, she had never considered how impossible it was that a selfish, vain, and impatient boy could become a meek, humble, and pious man, merely by adopting a profession in which such qualities are required. But now, at sixteen, she was beginning to understand all this. Not by any process of thought, but by something more like a correct feeling, she perceived that Edward would never be the true minister of Christ. So, more glad and thankful than sorry, though sorrow mingled with her sentiments, she learned the decision that he was to be an attorney.

Frank Buxton all this time was growing up into a young man. The hopes both of father and mother were bound up in him; and, according to the difference in their characters was the difference in their hopes. It seemed, indeed, probable that Mr. Buxton, who was singularly void of worldliness or ambition for himself, would become worldly and ambitious for his son. His hopes for Frank were all for honour and distinction here. Mrs. Buxton's hopes were prayers. She was fading away, as light fades into darkness on a summer evening. No one seemed to remark the gradual progress; but she was fully conscious of it herself. The last time that Frank was at home from college before her death, she knew that she should never see him again; and when he gaily left the house, with a cheerfulness which was partly assumed, she dragged herself with languid steps into a room at the front of the house, from which she could watch him down

the long straggling little street, that led to the inn from which the coach started. As he went along, he turned to look back at his house; and there he saw his mother's white figure gazing after him. He could not see her wistful eyes, but he made her poor heart give a leap of joy by turning round and running back for one more kiss and one more blessing.

When he next came home, it was at the sudden summons of her death.

His father was as one distracted. He could not speak of the lost angel without sudden bursts of tears, and oftentimes of self-upbraiding, which disturbed the calm, still, holy ideas which Frank liked to associate with her. He ceased speaking to him, therefore, about their mutual loss; and it was a certain kind of relief to both when he did so; but he longed for some one to whom he might talk of his mother with the quiet reverence of intense and trustful affection. He thought of Maggie, of whom he had seen but little of late; for when he had been at Combehurst, she had felt that Mrs. Buxton required her presence less, and had remained more at home. Possibly Mrs. Buxton regretted this; but she never said anything. She, far-looking, as one who was near death, foresaw that, probably, if Maggie and her son met often in her sick-room, feelings might arise which would militate against her husband's hopes and plans, and which, therefore, she ought not to allow to spring up. But she had been unable to refrain from expressing her gratitude to Maggie for many hours of tranquil happiness, and had unconsciously dropped many sentences which made Frank feel that, in the little brown mouse of former years, he was likely to meet with one who could tell him much of the inner history of his mother in her last days, and to whom he could speak of her without calling out the passionate sorrow which was so little in unison with her memory.

Accordingly, one afternoon, late in the autumn, he rode up to Mrs. Browne's. The air on the heights was so still,

that nothing seemed to stir. Now and then a yellow leaf came floating down from the trees, detached from no outward violence, but only because its life had reached its full limit, and then ceased. Looking down on the distant sheltered woods, they were gorgeous in orange and crimson, but their splendour was felt to be the sign of the decaying and dying year. Even without an inward sorrow, there was a grand solemnity in the season which impressed the mind, and hushed it into tranquil thought. Frank rode slowly along, and quietly dismounted at the old horse-mount, beside which there was an iron bridle-ring fixed in the grey stone wall. He saw the casement of the parlour-window open, and Maggie's head bent down over her work. She looked up as he entered the court, and his footsteps sounded on the flag-walk. She came round and opened the door. As she stood in the doorway, speaking, he was struck by her resemblance to some old painting. He had seen her young, calm face, shining out with great peacefulness, and the large, grave, thoughtful eyes, giving the character to the features, which otherwise they might, from their very regularity, have wanted. Her brown dress had the exact tint which a painter would have admired. The slanting mellow sunlight fell upon her as she stood; and the vine-leaves, already frost-tinted, made a rich, warm border, as they hung over the old house-door.

"Mamma is not well; she is gone to lie down. How are you? How is Mr. Buxton?"

"We are both pretty well; quite well, in fact, as far as regards health. May I come in? I want to talk to you, Maggie!"

She opened the little parlour-door, and they went in; but for a time they were both silent. They could not speak of her who was with them, present in their thoughts. Maggie shut the casement, and put a log of wood on the fire. She sat down with her back to the window; but as the flames sprang up, and blazed at the touch of the dry wood, Frank saw that her face was wet with quiet tears. Still her voice

was even and gentle, as she answered his questions. She seemed to understand what were the very things he would care most to hear. She spoke of his mother's last days; and, without any word of praise (which, indeed, would have been impertinence), she showed such a just and true appreciation of her who was dead and gone, that he felt as if he could listen for ever to the sweet dropping words. They were balm to his sore heart. He had thought it possible that the suddenness of her death might have made her life incomplete, in that she might have departed without being able to express wishes and projects which would now have the sacred force of commands. But he found that Maggie, though she had never intruded herself as such, had been the depositary of many little thoughts and plans; or, if they were not expressed to her, she knew that Mr. Buxton or Dawson was aware of what they were, though, in their violence of early grief, they had forgotten to name them. The flickering brightness of the flame had died away; the gloom of evening had gathered into the room, through the open door of which the kitchen fire sent a ruddy glow, distinctly marked against carpet and wall. Frank still sat, with his head buried in his hands, against the table, listening.

"Tell me more," he said, at every pause.

"I think I have told you all now," said Maggie, at last. "At least, it is all I recollect at present; but if I think of anything more, I will be sure and tell you."

"Thank you; do." He was silent for some time.

"Erminia is coming home at Christmas. She is not to go back to Paris again. She will live with us. I hope you and she will be great friends, Maggie."

"Oh yes," replied she. "I think we are already. At least we were last Christmas. You know it is a year since I have seen her."

"Yes; she went to Switzerland with Mademoiselle Michel, instead of coming home the last time. Maggie, I must go now. My father will be waiting dinner for me."

"Dinner! I was going to ask if you would not stay to tea. I hear mamma stirring about in her room. And Nancy is getting things ready, I see. Let me go and tell mamma. She will not be pleased unless she sees you. She has been very sorry for you all," added she, dropping her voice.

Before he could answer, she ran upstairs.

Mrs. Browne came down.

"Oh, Mr. Frank! Have you been sitting in the dark? Maggie, you ought to have rung for candles! Ah! Mr. Frank, you've had a sad loss since I saw you here—let me see—in the last week of September. But she was always a sad invalid; and no doubt your loss is her gain. Poor Mr. Buxton, too! How is he? When one thinks of him, and of her years of illness, it seems like a happy release."

She could have gone on for any length of time, but Frank could not bear this ruffling up of his soothed grief, and told her that his father was expecting him home to dinner.

"Ah! I am sure you must not disappoint him. He'll want a little cheerful company more than ever now. You must not let him dwell on it, Mr. Frank, but turn his thoughts another way by always talking of other things. I am sure if I had some one to speak to me in a cheerful, pleasant way, when poor dear Mr. Browne died, I should never have fretted after him as I did; but the children were too young, and there was no one to come and divert me with any news. If I'd been living in Combehurst, I am sure I should not have let my grief get the better of me as I did. Could you get up a quiet rubber in the evenings, do you think?"

But Frank had shaken hands and was gone. As he rode home he thought much of sorrow, and the different ways of bearing it. He decided that it was sent by God for some holy purpose, and to call out into existence some higher good; and he thought that, if it were faithfully taken as His decree, there would be no passionate, despairing resistance to it; nor yet, if it were trustfully acknowledged to have some wise end, should we dare to baulk it, and defraud it by putting it

on one side, and, by seeking the distractions of worldly things, not let it do its full work. And then he returned to his conversation with Maggie. That had been real comfort to him. What an advantage it would be to Erminia to have such a girl for a friend and companion!

It was rather strange that, having this thought, and having been struck, as I said, with Maggie's appearance while she stood in the doorway (and I may add that this impression of her unobtrusive beauty had been deepened by several succeeding interviews), he should reply as he did to Erminia's remark, on first seeing Maggie after her return from France.

"How lovely Maggie is growing! Why, I had no idea she would ever turn out pretty. Sweet-looking, she always was; but now her style of beauty makes her positively distinguished. Frank! speak: is not she beautiful?"

"Do you think so?" answered he, with a kind of lazy indifference, exceedingly gratifying to his father, who was listening with some eagerness to his answer. That day, after dinner, Mr. Buxton began to ask his opinion of Erminia's appearance.

Frank answered at once—

"She is a dazzling little creature. Her complexion looks as if it were made of cherries and milk; and, it must be owned, the little lady has studied the art of dress to some purpose in Paris."

Mr. Buxton was nearer happiness at this reply than he had ever been since his wife's death; for the only way he could devise to satisfy his reproachful conscience towards his neglected and unhappy sister, was to plan a marriage between his son and her child. He rubbed his hands, and drank two extra glasses of wine.

"We'll have the Brownes to dinner, as usual, next Thursday," said he. "I am sure your mother would have been hurt if we had omitted it; it is now nine years since they began to come, and they have never missed one Christmas since. Do you see any objection, Frank?"

"None at all, sir," answered he. "I intend to go up to town soon after Christmas, for a week or ten days, on my way to Cambridge. Can I do anything for you?"

"Well, I don't know. I think I shall go up myself some day soon. I can't understand all these lawyers' letters about the purchase of the Newbridge estate; and I fancy I could make more sense out of it all, if I saw Mr. Hodgson."

"I wish you would adopt my plan, of having an agent, sir. Your affairs are really so complicated now, that they would take up the time of an expert man of business. I am sure all those tenants at Dumford ought to be seen after."

"I do see after them. There's never a one that dares cheat me, or that would cheat me if they could. Most of them have lived under the Buxtons for generations. They know that, if they dared to take advantage of me, I should come down upon them pretty smartly."

"Do you rely upon their attachment to your family, or on their idea of your severity?"

"On both. They stand me instead of much trouble in account-keeping, and those eternal lawyers' letters some people are always despatching to their tenants. When I'm cheated, Frank, I give you leave to make me have an agent, but not till then. There's my little Erminia singing away, and nobody to hear her."

CHAPTER V

Christmas Day was strange and sad. Mrs. Buxton had always contrived to be in the drawing-room, ready to receive them all after dinner. Mr. Buxton tried to do away with his thoughts of her by much talking; but every now and then he looked wistfully towards the door. Erminia exerted herself to be as lively as she could, in order, if possible, to fill

up the vacuum. Edward, who had come over from Woodchester for a walk, had a good deal to say; and was, unconsciously, a great assistance with his never-ending flow of rather clever small-talk. His mother felt proud of her son, and his new waistcoat, which was far more conspicuously of the latest fashion than Frank's could be said to be. After dinner, when Mr. Buxton and the two young men were left alone, Edward launched out still more. He thought he was impressing Frank with his knowledge of the world, and the world's ways. But he was doing all in his power to repel one who had never been much attracted towards him. Worldly success was his standard of merit. The end seemed with him to justify the means; if a man prospered, it was not necessary to scrutinise his conduct too closely. The law was viewed in its lowest aspect, and yet with a certain cleverness, which preserved Edward from being intellectually contemptible. Frank had entertained some idea of studying for a barrister himself: not so much as a means of livelihood as to gain some idea of the code which makes and shows a nation's conscience; but Edward's details of the ways in which the letter so often baffles the spirit, made him recoil. With some anger against himself, for viewing the profession with disgust, because it was degraded by those who embraced it, instead of looking upon it as what might be ennobled and purified into a vast intelligence by high and pure-minded men, he got up abruptly and left the room.

The girls were sitting over the drawing-room fire, with unlighted candles on the table, talking, he felt, about his mother; but when he came in they rose, and changed their tone. Erminia went to the piano, and sang her newest and choicest French airs. Frank was gloomy and silent; but when she changed into more solemn music his mood was softened. Maggie's simple and hearty admiration, untinged by the slightest shade of envy for Erminia's accomplishments, charmed him. The one appeared to him the perfection of elegant art, the other of graceful nature. When he looked at Maggie, and thought of the moorland home from

which she had never wandered, the mysteriously beautiful lines of Wordsworth seemed to become sun-clear to him :—

> "And she shall lean her ear
> In many a secret place
> Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
> And beauty born of murmuring sound
> Shall pass into her face."

Mr. Buxton, in the dining-room, was really getting to take an interest in Edward's puzzling cases. They were like tricks at cards. A quick motion, and out of the unpromising heap, all confused together, presto! the right card turned up. Edward stated his case, so that there did not seem a loophole for the desired verdict; but, through some conjuration, it always came uppermost at last. He had a graphic way of relating things: and, as he did not spare epithets in his designation of the opposing party, Mr. Buxton took it upon trust that the defendant or the prosecutor (as it might happen) was a "pettifogging knave," or a "miserly curmudgeon," and rejoiced accordingly in the triumph over him gained by the ready wit of "our governor," Mr. Bish. At last he became so deeply impressed with Edward's knowledge of law, as to consult him about some cottage property he had in Woodchester.

"I rather think there are twenty-one cottages, and they don't bring me in four pounds a year; and out of that I have to pay for collecting. Would there be any chance of selling them? They are in Doughty Street; a bad neighbourhood, I fear."

"Very bad," was Edward's prompt reply. "But if you are really anxious to effect a sale, I have no doubt I could find a purchaser in a short time."

"I should be very much obliged to you," said Mr. Buxton, "You would be doing me a kindness. If you meet with a purchaser, and can manage the affair, I would rather that you drew out the deeds for the transfer of the property. It would be the beginning of business for you; and I only hope I should bring you good luck."

Of course Edward could do this; and when they left the table, it was with a feeling on his side that he was a step nearer to the agency which he coveted, and with a happy consciousness on Mr. Buxton's of having put a few pounds in the way of a deserving and remarkably clever young man.

Since Edward had left home, Maggie had gradually, but surely, been gaining in importance. Her judgment and her untiring unselfishness could not fail to make way. Her mother had some respect for, and great dependence on her; but still it was hardly affection that she felt for her; or, if it was, it was a dull and torpid kind of feeling, compared with the fond love and exulting pride which she took in Edward. When he came back for occasional holidays, his mother's face was radiant with happiness, and her manner towards him was even more caressing than he approved of. When Maggie saw him repel the hand that fain would have stroked his hair as in childish days, a longing came into her heart for some of these uncared-for tokens of her mother's love. Otherwise, she meekly sank back into her old secondary place, content to have her judgment slighted and her wishes unasked as long as he stayed. At times she was now beginning to disapprove and regret some things in him; his flashiness of manner jarred against her taste; and a deeper, graver feeling was called out by his evident want of quick moral perception. "Smart and clever," or "slow and dull," took with him the place of "right and wrong." Little as he thought it, he was himself narrow-minded and dull; slow and blind to perceive the beauty and eternal wisdom of simple goodness.

Erminia and Maggie became great friends. Erminia used to beg for Maggie, until she herself put a stop to the practice; as she saw her mother yielded more frequently than was convenient, for the honour of having her daughter a visitor at Mr. Buxton's, about which she could talk to her few acquaintances who persevered in calling at the cottage. Then Erminia volunteered a visit of some days to Maggie, and Mrs. Browne's pride was redoubled; but she made so many preparations,

and so much fuss, and gave herself so much trouble, that she was positively ill during Erminia's stay; and Maggie felt that she must henceforward deny herself the pleasure of having her friend for a guest, as her mother could not be persuaded from attempting to provide things in the same abundance and style as that to which Erminia was accustomed at home; whereas, as Nancy shrewdly observed, the young lady did not know if she were eating jelly, or porridge, or whether the plates were common delf or the best china, so long as she was with her dear Miss Maggie. Spring went, and summer came. Frank had gone to and fro between Cambridge and Combehurst, drawn by motives of which he felt the force, but into which he did not care to examine. Edward had sold the property of Mr. Buxton; and he, pleased with the possession of half the purchase money (the remainder of which was to be paid by instalments), and happy in the idea that his son came over so frequently to see Erminia, had amply rewarded the young attorney for his services.

One summer's day, as hot as day could be, Maggie had been busy all morning; for the weather was so sultry that she could not allow either Nancy or her mother to exert themselves much. She had gone down with the old brown pitcher, coeval with herself, to the spring for water; and while it was trickling, and making a tinkling music, she sat down on the ground. The air was so still that she heard the distant wood-pigeons cooing; and round about her the bees were murmuring busily among the clustering heath. From some little touch of sympathy with these low sounds of pleasant harmony, she began to try and hum some of Erminia's airs. She never sang out loud, or put words to her songs; but her voice was very sweet, and it was a great pleasure to herself to let it go into music. Just as her jug was filled, she was startled by Frank's sudden appearance. She had thought he was at Cambridge, and from some cause or other, her face, usually so faint in colour, became the most vivid scarlet. They were both too conscious to speak.

Maggie stooped (murmuring some words of surprise) to take up her pitcher.

"Don't go yet, Maggie," said he, putting his hand on hers to stop her; but somehow, when that purpose was effected, he forgot to take it off again. "I have come all the way from Cambridge to see you. I could not bear suspense any longer. I grew so impatient for certainty of some kind, that I went up to town last night, in order to feel myself on my way to you, even though I knew I could not be here a bit earlier to-day for doing so. Maggie, dear Maggie! how you are trembling! Have I frightened you? Nancy told me you were here; but it was very thoughtless to come so suddenly upon you."

It was not the suddenness of his coming; it was the suddenness of her own heart, which leaped up with the feelings called out by his words. She went very white, and sat down on the ground as before. But she rose again immediately, and stood with drooping, averted head. He had dropped her hand, but now sought to take it again.

"Maggie, darling, may I speak?" Her lips moved, he saw, but he could not hear. A pang of affright ran through him that, perhaps, she did not wish to listen. "May I speak to you?" he asked again, quite timidly. She tried to make her voice sound, but it would not; so she looked round. Her soft grey eyes were eloquent in that one glance. And, happier than his words, passionate and tender as they were, could tell, he spoke till her trembling was changed into bright flashing blushes, and even a shy smile hovered about her lips, and dimpled her cheeks.

The water bubbled over the pitcher unheeded. At last she remembered all the work-a-day world. She lifted up the jug, and would have hurried home, but Frank decidedly took it from her.

"Henceforward," said he, "I have a right to carry your burdens." So with one arm round her waist, and with the other carrying the water, they climbed the steep turfy slope. Near the top she wanted to take it again.

"Mamma will not like it. Mamma will think it so strange."

"Why, dearest, if I saw Nancy carrying it up this slope I would take it from her. It would be strange if a man did not carry it for any woman. But you must let me tell your mother of my right to help you. It is your dinner-time, is it not? I may come in to dinner as one of the family, may not I, Maggie?"

"No," she said softly. For she longed to be alone; and she dreaded being overwhelmed by the expression of her mother's feelings, weak and agitated as she felt herself. "Not to-day."

"Not to-day!" said he reproachfully. "You are very hard upon me. Let me come to tea. If you will, I will leave you now. Let me come to early tea. I must speak to my father. He does not know I am here. I may come to tea. At what time is it? Three o'clock. Oh, I know you drink tea at some strange early hour; perhaps it is at two. I will take care to be in time."

"Don't come till five, please. I must tell mamma; and I want some time to think. It does seem so like a dream. Do go, please."

"Well! if I must, I must. But I don't feel as if I were in a dream, but in some real blessed heaven, so long as I see you."

At last he went. Nancy was awaiting Maggie at the side-gate.

"Bless us and save us, bairn! what a time it has taken thee to get the water. Is the spring dry with the hot weather?"

Maggie ran past her. All dinner-time she heard her mother's voice in long-continued lamentation about something. She answered at random, and startled her mother by asserting that she thought "it" was very good—the said "it" being milk turned sour by thunder. Mrs. Browne spoke quite sharply:—"No one is so particular as you, Maggie. I have known you drink water, day after day, for breakfast, when you were a little girl, because your cup of milk had a

drowned fly in it; and now you tell me you don't care for this, and don't mind that, just as if you could eat up all the things which are spoiled by the heat. I declare my head aches so, I shall go and lie down as soon as ever dinner is over."

If this was her plan, Maggie thought she had no time to lose in making her confession. Frank would be here before her mother got up again to tea. But she dreaded speaking about her happiness; it seemed as yet so cobweb-like, as if a touch would spoil its beauty.

"Mamma, just wait one minute. Just sit down in your chair while I tell you something. Please, dear mamma." She took a stool, and sat at her mother's feet; and then she began to turn the wedding-ring on Mrs. Browne's hand, looking down and never speaking, till the latter became impatient.

"What is it you have got to say, child? Do make haste, for I want to go upstairs."

With a great jerk of resolution, Maggie said—

"Mamma, Frank Buxton has asked me to marry him."

She hid her face in her mother's lap for an instant; and then she lifted it up, as brimful of the light of happiness as is the cup of a water-lily of the sun's radiance.

"Maggie—you don't say so," said her mother half-incredulously. "It can't be, for he's at Cambridge, and it's not post-day. What do you mean?"

"He came this morning, mother, when I was down at the well; and we fixed that I was to speak to you; and he asked if he might come again for tea."

"Dear! dear! and the milk all gone sour! we should have had milk of our own if Edward had not persuaded me against buying another cow."

"I don't think Mr. Buxton will mind it much," said Maggie, dimpling up, as she remembered, half-unconsciously, how little he had seemed to care for anything but herself.

"Why, what a thing it is for you!" said Mrs. Browne, quite roused up from her langour and her headache. "Everybody said he was engaged to Miss Erminia. Are you quite sure you made no mistake, child? What did he

say? Young men are so fond of making fine speeches, and young women are so silly in fancying they mean something. I once knew a girl who thought that a gentleman who sent her mother a present of a sucking-pig did it as a delicate way of making her an offer. Tell me his exact words."

But Maggie blushed, and either would not or could not. So Mrs. Browne began again—

"Well, if you're sure, you're sure. I wonder how he brought his father round. So long as he and Erminia have been planned for each other! That very first day we ever dined there after your father's death, Mr. Buxton as good as told me all about it. I fancied they were only waiting till they were out of mourning."

All this was news to Maggie. She had never thought that either Erminia or Frank was particularly fond of the other; still less had she any idea of Mr. Buxton's plans for them. Her mother's surprise at her engagement jarred a little upon her, too; it had become so natural, even in these last two hours, to feel that she belonged to *him*. But there were more discords to come. Mrs. Browne began again, half in soliloquy—

"I should think he would have four thousand a year. He did not tell you, love, did he, if they had still that bad property in the canal, that his father complained about? But he will have four thousand. Why, you'll have your carriage, Maggie. Well! I hope Mr. Buxton has taken it kindly, because he'll have a deal to do with the settlements. I'm sure I thought he was engaged to Erminia."

Ringing changes on these subjects all the afternoon, Mrs. Browne sat with Maggie. She occasionally wandered off to speak about Edward, and how favourably his future prospects would be advanced by the engagement.

"Let me see—there's the house in Combehurst; the rent of that would be a hundred and fifty a year, but we'll not reckon that. But there's the quarries" (she was reckoning upon her fingers in default of a slate, for which she had vainly searched), "we'll call them two hundred a year; for

I don't believe Mr. Buxton's stories about their only bringing him in sevenpence; and there's Newbridge, that's certainly thirteen hundred—where had I got to, Maggie?"

"Dear mamma, do go and lie down for a little; you look quite flushed," said Maggie softly.

Was this the manner to view her betrothal to such a man as Frank? Her mother's remarks depressed her more than she could have thought possible; the excitement of the morning was having its reaction, and she longed to go up to the solitude under the thorn-tree, where she had hoped to spend a quiet thoughtful afternoon.

Nancy came in to replace glasses and spoons in the cupboard. By some accident, the careful old servant broke one of the former. She looked up quickly at her mistress, who usually visited all such offences with no small portion of rebuke.

"Never mind, Nancy," said Mrs. Browne. "It's only an old tumbler; and Maggie's going to be married, and we must buy a new set for the wedding dinner."

Nancy looked at both, bewildered; at last a light dawned into her mind, and her face looked shrewdly and knowingly back at Mrs. Browne. Then she said very quietly—

"I think I'll take the next pitcher to the well myself, and try my luck. To think how sorry I was for Miss Maggie this morning! 'Poor thing,' says I to myself, 'to be kept all this time at that confounded well' (for I'll not deny that I swear a bit to myself at times—it sweetens the blood), 'and she's so tired.' I e'en thought I'd go help her; but I reckon she'd some other help. May I take a guess at the young man?"

"Four thousand a year, Nancy!" said Mrs. Browne exultingly.

"And a blithe look, and a warm, kind heart, and a free step, and a noble way with him to rich and poor—aye, aye, I know the name. No need to alter all my neat M. B.'s, done in turkey-red cotton. Well, well, every one's turn comes some time, but mine's rather long a-coming."

The faithful old servant came up to Maggie, and put her hand caressingly on her shoulder. Maggie threw her arms round her neck, and kissed the brown, withered face.

"God bless thee, bairn," said Nancy solemnly. It brought the low music of peace back into the still recesses of Maggie's heart. She began to look out for her lover; half-hidden behind the muslin window curtain, which waved gently to and fro in the afternoon breezes. She heard a firm, buoyant step, and had only time to catch one glimpse of his face before moving away. But that one glance made her think that the hours which had elapsed since she saw him had not been serene to him any more than to her.

When he entered the parlour, his face was glad and bright. He went up in a frank, rejoicing way to Mrs. Browne, who was evidently rather puzzled how to receive him—whether as Maggie's betrothed, or as the son of the greatest man of her acquaintance.

"I am sure, sir," said she, "we are all very much obliged to you for the honour you have done our family!"

He looked rather perplexed as to the nature of the honour which he had conferred without knowing it; but, as the light dawned upon him, he made answer in a frank, merry way, which was yet full of respect for his future mother-in-law—

"And I am sure I am truly grateful for the honour one of your family has done me."

When Nancy brought in tea she was dressed in her fine-weather Sunday gown: the first time it had ever been worn out of church, and the walk to and fro.

After tea, Frank asked Maggie if she would walk out with him, and accordingly they climbed the Fell Lane, and went out upon the moors, which seemed vast and boundless as their love.

"Have you told your father?" asked Maggie; a dim anxiety lurking in her heart.

"Yes," said Frank. He did not go on, and she feared to

ask, although she longed to know how Mr. Buxton had received the intelligence.

"What did he say?" at length she inquired.

"Oh! it was evidently a new idea to him that I was attached to you, and he does not take up a new idea speedily. He has had some notion, it seems, that Erminia and I were to make a match of it; but she and I agreed, when we talked it over, that we should never have fallen in love with each other if there had not been another human being in the world. Erminia is a little sensible creature, and says she does not wonder at any man falling in love with you. Nay, Maggie, don't hang your head so down; let me have a glimpse of your face."

"I am sorry your father does not like it," said Maggie sorrowfully.

"So am I. But we must give him time to get reconciled. Never fear but he will like it in the long run; he has too much good taste and good feeling. He must like you."

Frank did not choose to tell even Maggie how violently his father had set himself against their engagement. He was surprised and annoyed at first to find how decidedly his father was possessed with the idea that he was to marry his cousin, and that she, at any rate, was attached to him, whatever his feelings might be towards her; but after he had gone frankly to Erminia and told her all, he found that she was as ignorant of her uncle's plans for her as he had been, and almost as glad at any event which should frustrate them.

Indeed, she came to the moorland cottage on the following day, after Frank had returned to Cambridge. She had left her horse in charge of the groom, near the fir-trees on the heights, and came running down the slope in her habit. Maggie went out to meet her, with just a little wonder at her heart if what Frank had said could possibly be true, and that Erminia, living in the house with him, could have remained indifferent to him. Erminia threw her arms round her neck, and they sat down together on the court-steps.

"I durst not ride down that hill, and Jem is holding my

horse, so I may not stay very long; now begin, Maggie, at once, and go into a rhapsody about Frank. Is not he a charming fellow? Oh! I am so glad. Now don't sit smiling and blushing there to yourself, but tell me a great deal about it. I have so wanted to know somebody that was in love, that I might hear what it was like, and the minute I could, I came off here. Frank is only just gone. He has had another long talk with my uncle, since he came back from you this morning: but I am afraid he has not made much way yet."

Maggie sighed. "I don't wonder at his not thinking me good enough for Frank."

"No; the difficulty would be to find any one he did think fit for his paragon of a son."

"He thought you were, dearest Erminia."

"So Frank has told you that, has he? I suppose we shall have no more family secrets now," said Erminia, laughing. "But I can assure you I had a strong rival in Lady Adela Castlemayne, the Duke of Wight's daughter; she was the most beautiful lady my uncle had ever seen (he only saw her in the Grand Stand at Woodchester races, and never spoke a word to her in his life). And if she would have had Frank, my uncle would still have been dissatisfied as long as the Princess Victoria was unmarried; none would have been good enough while a better remained. But Maggie," said she, smiling up into her friend's face, "I think it would have made you laugh, for all you look as if a kiss would shake the tears out of your eyes, if you could have seen my uncle's manner to me all day. He will have it that I am suffering from an unrequited attachment; so he watched me and watched me over breakfast; and at last, when I had eaten a whole nest-full of eggs, and I don't know how many pieces of toast, he rang the bell and asked for some potted charr. I was quite unconscious that it was for me, and I did not want it when it came; so he sighed in a most melancholy manner, and said, 'My poor Erminia!' If Frank had not been there, and looking dreadfully miserable, I am sure I should have laughed out."

"Did Frank look miserable?" said Maggie anxiously.

"There, now! you don't care for anything but the mention of his name."

"But did he look unhappy?" persisted Maggie.

"I can't say he looked happy, dear Mousey; but it was quite different when he came back from seeing you. You know you always had the art of stilling any person's trouble. You and my Aunt Buxton are the only two I ever knew with that gift."

"I am so sorry he has any trouble to be stilled," said Maggie.

"And I think it will do him a world of good. Think how successful his life has been! the honours he got at Eton; his picture taken, and I don't know what! and at Cambridge just the same way of going on. He would be insufferably imperious in a few years if he did not meet with a few crosses."

"Imperious!—oh, Erminia, how can you say so?"

"Because it's the truth. He happens to have very good dispositions; and therefore his strong will is not either disagreeable or offensive; but once let him become possessed by a wrong wish, and you would then see how vehement and imperious he would be. Depend upon it, my uncle's resistance is a capital thing for him. As dear sweet Aunt Buxton would have said, 'There is a holy purpose in it;' and as Aunt Buxton would not have said, but as I, a 'fool, rush in where angels fear to tread,' I decide that the purpose is to teach Master Frank patience and submission."

"Erminia—how could you help"—and there Maggie stopped.

"I know what you mean; how could I help falling in love with him? I think he has not mystery and reserve enough for me. I should like a man with some deep, impenetrable darkness round him; something one could always keep wondering about. Besides, think what clashing of wills there would have been! My uncle was very short-sighted in his plan; but I don't think he thought so much

about the fitness of our characters and ways as the fitness of our fortunes!"

"For shame, Erminia! No one cares less for money than Mr. Buxton!"

"There's a good little daughter-in-law elect! But seriously, I do think he's beginning to care for money; not in the least for himself, but as a means of aggrandisement for Frank. I have observed, since I came home at Christmas, a growing anxiety to make the most of his property; a thing he never cared about before. I don't think he is aware of it himself; but from one or two little things I have noticed, I should not wonder if he ends in being avaricious in his old age." Erminia sighed.

Maggie had almost a sympathy with the father, who sought what he imagined to be for the good of his son, and that son, Frank. Although she was as convinced as Erminia that money could not really help any one to happiness, she could not at the instant resist saying—

"Oh! how I wish I had a fortune! I should so like to give it all to him."

"Now, Maggie! don't be silly! I never heard you wish for anything different from what *was* before; so I shall take this opportunity of lecturing you on your folly. No! I won't either, for you look sadly tired with all your agitation; and, besides, I must go, or Jem will be wondering what has become of me. Dearest cousin-in-law, I shall come very often to see you; and perhaps I shall give you my lecture yet."

CHAPTER VI

It was true of Mr. Buxton, as well as of his son, that he had the seeds of imperiousness in him. His life had not been such as to call them out into view. With more wealth than

he required; with a gentle wife, who if she ruled him never showed it, or was conscious of the fact herself; looked up to by his neighbours, a simple affectionate set of people, whose fathers had lived near his father and grandfather in the same kindly relation, receiving benefits cordially given, and requiting them with good will and respectful attention: such had been the circumstances surrounding him; and, until his son grew out of childhood, there had not seemed a wish which he had it not in his power to gratify as soon as formed. Again, when Frank was at school and at college, all went on prosperously; he gained honours enough to satisfy a far more ambitious father. Indeed, it was the honours he gained that stimulated his father's ambition. He received letters from tutors and headmasters, prophesying that, if Frank chose, he might rise to the "highest honours in Church or State;" and the idea thus suggested, vague as it was, remained, and filled Mr. Buxton's mind; and, for the first time in his life, made him wish that his own career had been such as would have led him to form connections among the great and powerful. But, as it was, his shyness and *gêne*, from being unaccustomed to society, had made him averse to Frank's occasional requests that he might bring such and such a schoolfellow, or college-chum, home on a visit. Now he regretted this, on account of the want of those connections which might thus have been formed; and, in his visions, he turned to marriage as the best way of remedying this. Erminia was right in saying that her uncle had thought of Lady Adela Castlemayne for an instant; though how the little witch had found it out I cannot say, as the idea had been dismissed immediately from his mind. He was wise enough to see its utter vanity, as long as his son remained undistinguished. But his hope was this. If Frank married Erminia, their united property (she being her father's heiress) would justify him in standing for the shire; or, if he could marry the daughter of some leading personage in the county, it might lead to the same step; and thus at once he would obtain a position in Parliament, where his great talents

would have scope and verge enough. Of these two visions, the favourite one (for his sister's sake) was that of marriage with Erminia.

And, in the midst of all this, fell, like a bomb-shell, the intelligence of his engagement with Maggie Browne; a good, sweet little girl enough, but without fortune or connection, without, as far as Mr. Buxton knew, the least power, or capability, or spirit, with which to help Frank on in his career to eminence in the land! He resolved to consider it as a boyish fancy, easily to be suppressed; and pooh-poohed it down, to Frank, accordingly. He remarked his son's set lips, and quiet, determined brow, although he never spoke in a more respectful tone than while thus steadily opposing his father. If he had shown more violence of manner, he would have irritated him less; but, as it was, it was the most miserable interview that had ever taken place between the father and son.

Mr. Buxton tried to calm himself down with believing that Frank would change his mind, if he saw more of the world; but, somehow, he had a prophesying distrust of this idea internally. The worst was, there was no fault to be found with Maggie herself, although she might want the accomplishments he desired to see in his son's wife. Her connections, too, were so perfectly respectable (though humble enough in comparison with Mr. Buxton's soaring wishes), that there was nothing to be objected to on that score; her position was the great offence. In proportion to his want of any reason but this one, for disapproving of the engagement, was his annoyance under it. He assumed a reserve towards Frank; which was so unusual a restraint upon his open, genial disposition, that it seemed to make him irritable towards all others in contact with him, excepting Erminia. He found it difficult to behave rightly to Maggie. Like all habitually cordial persons, he went into the opposite extreme, when he wanted to show a little coolness. However angry he might be with the events of which she was the cause, she was too innocent and meek to justify him in being

more than cool; but his awkwardness was so great, that many a man of the world has met his greatest enemy, each knowing the other's hatred, with less freezing distance of manner than Mr. Buxton's to Maggie. While she went simply on in her own path, loving him the more through all, for old kindness' sake, and because he was Frank's father, he shunned meeting her with such evident and painful anxiety, that at last she tried to spare him the encounter, and hurried out of church, or lingered behind all, in order to avoid the only chance they now had of being forced to speak; for she no longer went to the dear house in Combehurst, though Erminia came to see her more than ever.

Mrs. Browne was perplexed and annoyed beyond measure. She upbraided Mr. Buxton to every one but Maggie. To her she said—"Any one in their senses might have foreseen what had happened, and would have thought well about it, before they went and fell in love with a young man of such expectations as Mr. Frank Buxton."

In the middle of all this dismay, Edward came over from Woodchester for a day or two. He had been told of the engagement in a letter from Maggie herself; but it was too sacred a subject for her to enlarge upon to him; and Mrs. Browne was no letter-writer. So this was his first greeting to Maggie, after kissing her—

"Well, Sancho, you've done famously for yourself. As soon as I got your letter I said to Harry Bish—'Still waters run deep; here's my little sister Maggie, as quiet a creature as ever lived, has managed to catch young Buxton, who has five thousand a year if he's a penny.' Don't go so red, Maggie. Harry was sure to hear of it soon from some one, and I see no use in keeping it secret, for it gives consequence to us all."

"Mr. Buxton is quite put out about it," said Mrs. Browne querulously; "and I'm sure he need not be, for he's enough of money, if that's what he wants; and Maggie's father was a clergyman, and I've seen 'yeoman,' with my own eyes, on old Mr. Buxton's (Mr. Lawrence's father's) carts; and a

clergyman is above a yeoman any day. But if Maggie had had any thought for other people, she'd never have gone and engaged herself, when she might have been sure it would give offence. We are never asked down to dinner now. I've never broken bread there since last Christmas."

"Whew," said Edward to this. It was a disappointed whistle: but he soon cheered up. "I thought I could have lent a hand in screwing old Buxton up about the settlements; but I see it's not come to that yet. Still, I'll go and see the old gentleman. I'm a bit of a favourite of his, and I've no doubt I can turn him round."

"Pray, Edward, don't go," said Maggie. "Frank and I are content to wait; and I'm sure we would rather not have any one speak to Mr. Buxton upon a subject which evidently gives him so much pain; please, Edward, don't!"

"Well, well. Only I must go about this property of his. Besides, I don't mean to get into disgrace; so I shan't seem to know anything about it, if it would make him angry. I want to keep on good terms, because of the agency. So, perhaps, I shall shake my head, and think it great presumption in you, Maggie, to have thought of becoming his daughter-in-law. If I can do you no good, I may as well do myself some."

"I hope you won't mention me at all," she replied.

One comfort (and almost the only one arising from Edward's visit) was, that she could now often be spared to go up to the thorn-tree, and calm down her anxiety, and bring all discords into peace, under the sweet influences of nature. Mrs. Buxton had tried to teach her the force of the lovely truth, that the "melodies of the everlasting chime" may abide in the hearts of those who ply their daily task in towns and crowded populous places; and that solitude is not needed by the faithful for them to feel the immediate presence of God; nor utter stillness of human sound necessary, before they can hear the music of His angel's footsteps: but, as yet, her soul was a young disciple; and she felt it easier to speak to Him, and come to Him for help, sitting lonely,

with wild moors swelling and darkening around her, and not a creature in sight but the white specks of distant sheep, and the birds that shun the haunts of men, floating in the still mid-air.

She sometimes longed to go to Mr. Buxton and tell him how much she could sympathise with him, if his dislike to her engagement arose from his thinking her unworthy of his son. Frank's character seemed to her grand in its promise. With vehement impulses, and natural gifts, craving worthy employment, his will sat supreme over all, like a young emperor calmly seated on his throne, whose fiery generals and wise counsellors stand alike ready to obey him. But if marriage were to be made by due measurement and balance of character, and if others, with their scales, were to be the judges, what would become of all the beautiful services rendered by the loyalty of true love? Where would be the raising up of the weak by the strong? or the patient endurance? or the gracious trust of her—

> "Whose faith is fixt and cannot move;
> She darkly feels him great and wise,
> She dwells on him with faithful eyes,
> 'I cannot understand: I love.'"

Edward's manners and conduct caused her more real anxiety than anything else. Indeed, no other thoughtfulness could be called anxiety compared to this. His faults, she could not but perceive, were strengthening with his strength, and growing with his growth. She could not help wondering whence he obtained the money to pay for his dress, which she thought was of a very expensive kind. She heard him also incidentally allude to "runs up to town," of which, at the time, neither she nor her mother had been made aware. He seemed confused when she questioned him about these, although he tried to laugh it off; and asked her how she, a country girl, cooped up among one set of people, could have any idea of the life it was necessary for a man to lead who "had any hope of getting on in the world." He must have acquaintances and connections, and see

something of life, and make an appearance. She was silenced, but not satisfied. Nor was she at ease with regard to his health. He looked ill, and worn; and, when he was not rattling and laughing, his face fell into a shape of anxiety and uneasiness which was new to her in it. He reminded her painfully of an old German engraving she had seen in Mrs. Buxton's portfolio, called, "Pleasure digging a Grave"; Pleasure being represented by a ghastly figure of a young man, eagerly industrious over his dismal work.

A few days after he went away, Nancy came to her in her bedroom.

"Miss Maggie," said she, "may I just speak a word?" But when the permission was given, she hesitated.

"It's none of my business, to be sure," said she at last: "only, you see, I've lived with your mother ever since she was married; and I care a deal for both you and Master Edward. And I think he drains Missus of her money; and it makes me not easy in my mind. You did not know of it, but he had his father's old watch when he was over last time but one; I thought he was of an age to have a watch, and that it was all natural. But, I reckon, he's sold it, and got that gimcrack one instead. That's, perhaps, natural too. Young folks like young fashions. But, this time, I think he has taken away your mother's watch; at least, I've never seen it since he went. And this morning she spoke to me about my wages. I'm sure I'd never asked for them, nor troubled her; but I'll own it's now near on to twelve months since she paid me; and she was as regular as clockwork till then. Now, Miss Maggie, don't look so sorry, or I shall wish I had never spoken. Poor Missus seemed sadly put about, and said something as I did not try to hear; for I was so vexed she should think I needed apologies, and them sort of things. I'd rather live with you without wage than have her look so shame-faced as she did this morning, I don't want a bit for money, my dear; I've a deal in the bank. But I'm afeard Master Edward is spending too much, and pinching Missus."

Maggie was very sorry indeed. Her mother had never told her anything of all this, so it was evidently a painful subject to her; and Maggie determined (after lying awake half the night) that she would write to Edward, and remonstrate with him; and that in every personal and household expense, she would be, more than ever, rigidly economical.

The full, free, natural intercourse between her lover and herself could not fail to be checked by Mr. Buxton's aversion to the engagement. Frank came over for some time in the early autumn. He had left Cambridge, and intended to enter himself at the Temple as soon as the vacation was ended. He had not been very long at home before Maggie was made aware, partly through Erminia, who had no notion of discreet silence on any point, and partly by her own observation, of the increasing estrangement between father and son. Mr. Buxton was reserved with Frank for the first time in his life; and Frank was depressed and annoyed at his father's obstinate repetition of the same sentence, in answer to all his arguments in favour of his engagement—arguments which were overwhelming to himself, and which it required an effort of patience on his part to go over and recapitulate, so obvious was the conclusion; and then to have the same answer for ever, the same words even—

"Frank! it's no use talking. I don't approve of the engagement; and never shall."

He would snatch up his hat, and hurry off to Maggie to be soothed. His father knew where he was gone without being told; and was jealous of her influence over the son who had long been his first and paramount object in life.

He needed not have been jealous. However angry and indignant Frank was when he went up to the moorland cottage, Maggie almost persuaded him, before half-an-hour had elapsed, that his father was but unreasonable from his extreme affection. Still she saw that such frequent differences would weaken the bond between father and son; and,

accordingly, she urged Frank to accept an invitation into Scotland.

"You told me," said she, "that Mr. Buxton will have it, it is but a boy's attachment; and that, when you have seen other people, you will change your mind; now do try how far you can stand the effects of absence." She said it playfully, but he was in a humour to be vexed.

"What nonsense, Maggie! You don't care for all this delay yourself; and you take up my father's bad reasons as if you believed them."

"I don't believe them; but still they may be true."

"How should you like it, Maggie, if I urged you to go about and see something of society, and try if you could not find some one you liked better? It is more probable in your case than in mine; for you have never been from home, and I have been half over Europe."

"You are very much afraid, are not you, Frank?" said she, her face bright with blushes, and her grey eyes smiling up at him. "I have a great idea that if I could see that Harry Bish that Edward is always talking about, I should be charmed. He must wear such beautiful waistcoats! Don't you think I had better see him before our engagement is quite, quite final?"

But Frank would not smile. In fact, like all angry persons, he found fresh matter for offence in every sentence. She did not consider the engagement as quite final: thus he chose to understand her playful speech. He would not answer. She spoke again—

"Dear Frank, you are not angry with me, are you? It is nonsense to think that we are to go about the world, picking and choosing men and women, as if they were fruit, and we were to gather the best; as if there was not something in our own hearts which, if we listen to it conscientiously, will tell us at once when we have met the one of all others. There now, am I sensible? I suppose I am, for your grim features are relaxing into a smile. That's right. But now listen to this. I think your father would come round sooner,

if he were not irritated every day by the knowledge of your visits to me. If you went away, he would know that we should write to each other, yet he would forget the exact time when; but now he knows as well as I do where you are when you are up here; and I fancy, from what Erminia says, it makes him angry the whole time you are away."

Frank was silent. At last he said—"It is rather provoking to be obliged to acknowledge that there is some truth in what you say. But even if I would, I am not sure that I could go. My father does not speak to me about his affairs, as he used to do; so I was rather surprised yesterday to hear him say to Erminia (though I'm sure he meant the information for me) that he had engaged an agent."

"Then there will be the less occasion for you to be at home. He won't want your help in his accounts."

"I've given him little enough of that. I have long wanted him to have somebody to look after his affairs. They are very complicated, and he is very careless. But I believe my signature will be wanted for some new leases; at least he told me so."

"That need not take you long," said Maggie.

"Not the mere signing. But I want to know something more about the property and the proposed tenants. I believe this Mr. Henry that my father has engaged is a very hard sort of man. He is what is called scrupulously honest and honourable, but I fear a little too much inclined to drive hard bargains for his client. Now I want to be convinced to the contrary, if I can, before I leave my father in his hands. So, you cruel judge, you won't transport me yet, will you?"

"No," said Maggie, overjoyed at her own decision, and blushing her delight that her reason was convinced it was right for Frank to stay a little longer.

The next day's post brought her a letter from Edward. There was not a word in it about her inquiry or remonstrance; it might never have been written, or never received; but a few hurried, anxious lines, asking her to write by

return of post, and say if it was really true that Mr. Buxton had engaged an agent. "It's a confounded shabby trick if he has, after what he said to me long ago. I cannot tell you how much I depend on your complying with my request. Once more, *write directly*. If Nancy cannot take the letter to the post, run down to Combehurst with it yourself. I must have an answer to-morrow, and every particular as to who, when to be appointed, &c. But I can't believe the report to be true."

Maggie asked Frank if she might name what he had told her the day before to her brother. He said—

"Oh, yes, certainly, if he cares to know. Of course, you will not say anything about my own opinion of Mr. Henry. He is coming to-morrow, and I shall be able to judge how far I am right."

CHAPTER VII

The next day Mr. Henry came. He was a quiet, stern-looking man, of considerable intelligence and refinement, and so much taste for music as to charm Erminia, who had rather dreaded his visit. But all the amenities of life were put aside when he entered Mr. Buxton's sanctum—his "office," as he called the room where he received his tenants and business-people. Frank thought Mr. Henry was scarce commonly civil in the open evidence of his surprise and contempt for the habits, of which the disorderly books and ledgers were but too visible signs. Mr. Buxton himself felt more like a schoolboy, bringing up an imperfect lesson, than he had ever done since he was thirteen.

"The only wonder, my good sir, is that you have any property left; that you have not been cheated out of every farthing."

"I'll answer for it," said Mr. Buxton in reply, "that you'll not find any cheating has been going on. They dared not, sir; they know I should make an example of the first rogue I found out."

Mr. Henry lifted up his eyebrows, but did not speak.

"Besides, sir, most of these men have lived for generations under the Buxtons. I'd give you my life, they would not cheat me."

Mr. Henry coldly said—

"I imagine a close examination of these books by some accountant will be the best proof of the honesty of these said tenants. If you will allow me, I will write to a clever fellow I know, and desire him to come down and try and regulate this mass of papers."

"Anything—anything you like," said Mr. Buxton, only too glad to escape from the lawyer's cold, contemptuous way of treating the subject.

The accountant came; and he and Mr. Henry were deeply engaged in the office for several days. Mr. Buxton was bewildered by the questions they asked him. Mr. Henry examined him in the worrying way in which an unwilling witness is made to give evidence. Many a time and oft did he heartily wish he had gone on in the old course to the end of his life, instead of putting himself into an agent's hands; but he comforted himself by thinking that, at any rate, they would be convinced he had never allowed himself to be cheated or imposed upon, although he did not make any parade of exactitude.

What was his dismay when, one morning, Mr. Henry sent to request his presence, and, with a cold, clear voice, read aloud an admirably drawn-up statement, informing the poor landlord of the defalcations, nay more, the impositions of those whom he had trusted. If he had been alone, he would have burst into tears, to find how his confidence had been abused. But, as it was, he became passionately angry.

"I'll prosecute them, sir. Not a man shall escape. I'll

make them pay back every farthing, I will. And damages, too. Crayston, did you say, sir? Was that one of the names? Why, that is the very Crayston who was bailiff under my father for years. The scoundrel! And I set him up in my best farm when he married. And he's been swindling me, has he?"

Mr. Henry ran over the items of the account—"£421, 13s. 4¾d. Part of this, I fear, we cannot recover"——

He was going on, but Mr. Buxton broke in—"But I will recover it. I'll have every farthing of it. I'll go to law with the viper. I don't care for money, but I hate ingratitude."

"If you like, I will take counsel's opinion on the case," said Mr. Henry coolly.

"Take anything you please, sir. Why, this Crayston was the first man that set me on a horse—and to think of his cheating me!"

A few days after this conversation, Frank came on his usual visit to Maggie.

"Can you come up to the thorn-tree, dearest?" said he. "It is a lovely day, and I want the solace of a quiet hour's talk with you."

So they went, and sat in silence some time, looking at the calm and still blue air about the summits of the hills, where never tumult of the world came to disturb the peace, and the quiet of whose heights was never broken by the loud, passionate cries of men.

"I am glad you like my thorn-tree," said Maggie.

"I like the view from it. The thought of the solitude which must be among the hollows of those hills pleases me particularly to-day. Oh, Maggie! it is one of the times when I get depressed about men and the world. We have had such sorrow, and such revelations, and remorse, and passion at home to-day. Crayston (my father's old tenant) has come over. It seems—I am afraid there is no doubt of it—he has been peculating to a large amount. My father has been too careless, and has placed his dependants in great temptation: and Crayston—he is an old man, with a large

extravagant family—has yielded. He has been served with notice of my father's intention to prosecute him; and came over to confess all, and ask for forgiveness, and time to pay back what he could. A month ago, my father would have listened to him, I think; but now, he is stung by Mr. Henry's sayings, and gave way to a furious passion. It has been a most distressing morning. The worst side of everybody seems to have come out. Even Crayston, with all his penitence and appearance of candour, had to be questioned closely by Mr. Henry before he would tell the whole truth. Good God! that money should have such power to corrupt men. It was all for money and money's worth, that this degradation has taken place. As for Mr. Henry, to save his client money, and to protect money, he does not care—he does not even perceive—how he induces deterioration of character. He has been encouraging my father in measures which I cannot call anything but vindictive. Crayston is to be made an example of, they say. As if my father had not half the sin on his own head! As if he had rightly discharged his duties as a rich man! Money was as dross to him; but he ought to have remembered how it might be as life itself to many, and be craved after, and coveted, till the black longing got the better of principle, as it has done with this poor Crayston. They say the man was once so truthful, and now his self-respect is gone; and he has evidently lost the very nature of truth. I dread riches. I dread the responsibility of them. At any rate, I wish I had begun life as a poor boy, and worked my way up to competence. Then I could understand and remember the temptations of poverty. I am afraid of my own heart becoming hardened as my father's is. You have no notion of his passionate severity to-day, Maggie! It was quite a new thing, even to me!"

"It will only be for a short time," said she. "He must be much grieved about this man."

"If I thought I could ever grow as hard and indifferent to the abject entreaties of a criminal as my father has been this morning—one whom he has helped to make, too—I

would go off to Australia at once. Indeed, Maggie, I think it would be the best thing we could do. My heart aches about the mysterious corruptions and evils of an old state of society such as we have in England. What do you say, Maggie? Would you go?"

She was silent—thinking.

"I would go with you directly, if it were right," said she at last. "But would it be? I think it would be rather cowardly. I feel what you say; but don't you think it would be braver to stay, and endure much depression and anxiety of mind for the sake of the good those always can do who see evils clearly? I am speaking all this time as if neither you nor I had any home duties, but were free to do as we liked."

"What can you or I do? We are less than drops in the ocean, as far as our influence can go to re-model a nation."

"As for that," said Maggie, laughing, "I can't re-model Nancy's old-fashioned ways; so I've never yet planned how to re-model a nation."

"Then what did you mean by the good those always can do who see evils clearly? The evils I see are those of a nation whose god is money."

"That is just because you have come away from a distressing scene. To-morrow you will hear or read of some heroic action meeting with a nation's sympathy, and you will rejoice and be proud of your country."

"Still I shall feel the evils of her complex state of society keenly; and where is the good I can do?"

"Oh! I can't tell in a minute. But cannot you bravely face these evils, and learn their nature and causes; and then has God given you no powers to apply to the discovery of their remedy? Dear Frank, think! It may be very little you can do—and you may never see the effect of it, any more than the widow saw the world-wide effect of her mite. Then, if all the good and thoughtful men run away from us to some new country, what are we to do with our poor, dear old England?"

"Oh, you must run away with the good thoughtful men (I mean to consider that as a compliment to myself, Maggie!). Will you let me wish I had been born poor, if I am to stay in England? I should not then be liable to this fault into which I see the rich men fall, of forgetting the trials of the poor."

"I am not sure whether, if you had been poor, you might not have fallen into an exactly parallel fault, and forgotten the trials of the rich. It is so difficult to understand the errors into which their position makes all men liable to fall. Do you remember a story in "Evenings at Home" called the Transmigrations of Indra? Well! when I was a child, I used to wish I might be transmigrated (is that the right word?) into an American slave-owner for a little while, just that I might understand how he must suffer, and be sorely puzzled, and pray and long to be freed from his odious wealth, till at last he grew hardened to its nature; and since then, I have wished to be the Emperor of Russia for the same reason. Ah! you may laugh; but that is only because I have not explained myself properly."

"I was only smiling to think how ambitious any one might suppose you were who did not know you."

"I don't see any ambition in it—I don't think of the station—I only want sorely to see the 'What's resisted' of Burns, in order that I may have more charity for those who seem to me to have been the cause of such infinite woe and misery."

"What's done we partly may compute;
But know not what's resisted,"

repeated Frank musingly. After some time he began again—

"But, Maggie, I don't give up this wish of mine to go to Australia—Canada, if you like it better—anywhere where there is a newer and purer state of society."

"The great objection seems to be your duty, as an only child, to your father. It is different to the case of one out of a large family."

"I wish I were one in twenty, then I might marry where I liked to-morrow."

"It would take two people's consent to such a rapid measure," said Maggie, laughing. "But now I am going to wish a wish, which it won't require a fairy godmother to gratify. Look, Frank, do you see in the middle of that dark brown purple streak of moor a yellow gleam of light? It is a pond, I think, that at this time of the year catches a slanting beam of the sun. It can't be very far off. I have wished to go to it every autumn. Will you go with me now? We shall have time before tea."

Frank's dissatisfaction with the stern measures that, urged on by Mr. Henry, his father took against all who had imposed upon his carelessness as a landlord, increased rather than diminished. He spoke warmly to him on the subject, but without avail. He remonstrated with Mr. Henry, and told him how he felt that, had his father controlled his careless nature, and been an exact, vigilant landlord, these tenantry would never have had the great temptation to do him wrong; and that therefore he considered some allowance should be made for them, and some opportunity given them to redeem their characters, which would be blasted and hardened for ever by the publicity of a lawsuit. But Mr. Henry only raised his eyebrows and made answer—

"I like to see these notions in a young man, sir. I had them myself at your age. I believe I had great ideas then on the subject of temptation and the force of circumstances, and was as Quixotic as any one about reforming rogues. But my experience has convinced me that roguery is innate. Nothing but outward force can control it, and keep it within bounds. The terrors of the law must be that outward force. I admire your kindness of heart; and in three-and-twenty we do not look for the wisdom and experience of forty or fifty."

Frank was indignant at being set aside as an unripe youth. He disapproved so strongly of all these measures, and of so much that was now going on at home under

Mr. Henry's influence, that he determined to pay his long-promised visit to Scotland; and Maggie, sad at heart to see how he was suffering, encouraged him in his determination.

CHAPTER VIII

After he was gone, there came a November of the most dreary and characteristic kind. There was incessant rain, and closing-in mists, without a gleam of sunshine to light up the drops of water, and make the wet stems and branches of the trees glisten. Every colour seemed dimmed and darkened; and the crisp autumnal glory of leaves fell soddened to the ground. The latest flowers rotted away without ever coming to their bloom; and it looked as if the heavy monotonous sky had drawn closer and closer, and shut in the little moorland cottage as with a shroud. Indoors, things were no more cheerful. Maggie saw that her mother was depressed, and she thought that Edward's extravagance must be the occasion. Oftentimes she wondered how far she might speak on the subject; and once or twice she drew near it in conversation; but her mother winced away, and Maggie could not as yet see any decided good to be gained from encountering such pain. To herself it would have been a relief to have known the truth—the worst, as far as her mother knew it; but she was not in the habit of thinking of herself. She only tried, by long tender attention, to cheer and comfort her mother; and she and Nancy strove in every way to reduce the household expenditure, for there was little ready money to meet it. Maggie wrote regularly to Edward; but since the note inquiring about the agency, she had never heard from him. Whether her mother received letters she did not know; but at any rate she did not express anxiety, though her looks and manner betrayed that she was

ill at ease. It was almost a relief to Maggie when some change was given to her thoughts by Nancy's becoming ill. The damp gloomy weather brought on some kind of rheumatic attack, which obliged the old servant to keep her bed. Formerly, in such an emergency, they would have engaged some cottager's wife to come and do the house-work; but now it seemed tacitly understood that they could not afford it. Even when Nancy grew worse, and required attendance in the night, Maggie still persisted in her daily occupations. She was wise enough to rest when and how she could; and, with a little forethought, she hoped to be able to go through this weary time without any bad effect. One morning (it was on the second of December; and even the change of name in the month, although it brought no change of circumstances or weather, was a relief—December brought glad tidings, even in its very name)—one morning, dim and dreary, Maggie had looked at the clock on leaving Nancy's room, and finding it was not yet half-past five, and knowing that her mother and Nancy were both asleep, she determined to lie down and rest for an hour before getting up to light the fires. She did not mean to go to sleep; but she was tired out, and fell into a sound slumber. When she awoke it was with a start. It was still dark; but she had a clear idea of being wakened by some distinct, rattling noise. There it was once more—against the window, like a shower of shot. She went to the lattice, and opened it to look out. She had that strange consciousness, not to be described, of the near neighbourhood of some human creature, although she neither saw nor heard any one for the first instant. Then Edward spoke in a hoarse whisper, right below the window, standing on the flower-beds—

"Maggie! Maggie! Come down and let me in. For your life, don't make any noise. No one must know."

Maggie turned sick. Something was wrong, evidently; and she was weak and weary. However, she stole down the old creaking stairs, and undid the heavy bolt, and let her brother in. She felt that his dress was quite wet, and she

led him, with cautious steps, into the kitchen, and shut the door, and stirred the fire, before she spoke. He sank into a chair, as if worn out with fatigue. She stood, expecting some explanation. But when she saw he could not speak, she hastened to make him a cup of tea; and, stooping down, took off his wet boots, and helped him off with his coat, and brought her own plaid to wrap round him. All this time her heart sunk lower and lower. He allowed her to do what she liked, as if he were an automaton; his head and his arms hung loosely down, and his eyes were fixed, in a glaring way, on the fire. When she brought him some tea, he spoke for the first time; she could not hear what he said till he repeated it, so husky was his voice—

"Have you no brandy?"

She had the key of the little wine-cellar, and fetched up some. But as she took a tea-spoon to measure it out, he tremblingly clutched at the bottle, and shook down a quantity into the empty tea-cup, and drank it off at one gulp. He fell back again in his chair; but in a few minutes he roused himself, and seemed stronger.

"Edward, dear Edward, what is the matter?" said Maggie at last; for he got up, and was staggering towards the outer door, as it he were going once more into the rain and dismal morning-twilight.

He looked at her fiercely, as she laid her hand on his arm.

"Confound you! Don't touch me. I'll not be kept here, to be caught and hung!"

For an instant she thought he was mad.

"Caught and hung!" she echoed. "My poor Edward! what do you mean?"

He sat down suddenly on a chair close by him, and covered his face with his hands. When he spoke, his voice was feeble and imploring.

"The police are after me, Maggie! What must I do? Oh! can you hide me? Can you save me?"

He looked wild, like a hunted creature. Maggie stood aghast. He went on—

"My mother!—Nancy! Where are they? I was wet through and starving, and I came here. Don't let them take me, Maggie, till I'm stronger and can give battle."

"Oh! Edward! Edward! What are you saying?" said Maggie, sitting down on the dresser, in absolute, bewildered despair. "What have you done?"

"I hardly know. I'm in a horrid dream. I see you think I'm mad; I wish I were. Won't Nancy come down soon? You must hide me."

"Poor Nancy is ill in bed!" said Maggie.

"Thank God," said he. "There's one less. But my mother will be up soon, will she not?"

"Not yet," replied Maggie. "Edward, dear, do try and tell me what you have done. Why should the police be after you?"

"Why, Maggie," said he, with a kind of forced, unnatural laugh, "they say I've forged."

"And have you?" asked Maggie, in a still, low tone of quiet agony.

He did not answer for some time, but sat, looking on the floor with unwinking eyes. At last he said, as if speaking to himself—

"If I have, it's no more than others have done before, and never been found out. I was but borrowing money. I meant to repay it. If I had asked Mr. Buxton, he would have lent it me."

"Mr. Buxton!" said Maggie.

"Yes!" answered he, looking sharply and suddenly up at her. "Your future father-in-law. My father's old friend. It is he that is hunting me to death! No need to look so white and horror-struck, Maggie! It's the way of the world, as I might have known, if I had not been a blind fool."

"Mr. Buxton!" she whispered faintly.

"Oh, Maggie!" said he, suddenly throwing himself at her feet, "save me! You can do it. Write to Frank, and make him induce his father to let me off. I came to see you, my sweet, merciful sister! I knew you would save me. Good

God! What noise is that? There are steps in the yard!"

And before she could speak, he had rushed into the little china closet, which opened out of the parlour, and crouched down in the darkness. It was only the man who brought their morning's supply of milk from a neighbouring farm. But when Maggie opened the kitchen door, she saw how the cold, pale light of a winter's day had filled the air.

"You're late with your shutters to-day, miss," said the man. "I hope Nancy has not been giving you all a bad night. Says I to Thomas, who came with me to the gate, 'It's many a year since I saw them parlour shutters barred up at half-past eight.'"

Maggie went, as soon as he was gone, and opened all the low windows, in order that they might look as usual. She wondered at her own outward composure, while she felt so dead and sick at heart. Her mother would soon get up; must she be told? Edward spoke to her now and then from his hiding-place. He dared not go back into the kitchen, into which the few neighbours they had were apt to come, on their morning's way to Combehurst, to ask if they could do any errands there for Mrs. Browne or Nancy. Perhaps a quarter of an hour or so had elapsed since the first alarm, when, as Maggie was trying to light the parlour fire, in order that the doctor, when he came, might find all as usual, she heard the click of the garden gate, and a man's step coming along the walk. She ran upstairs to wash away the traces of the tears which had been streaming down her face as she went about her work, before she opened the door. There, against the watery light of the rainy day without, stood Mr. Buxton. He hardly spoke to her, but pushed past her, and entered the parlour. He sat down, looking as if he did not know what he was doing. Maggie tried to keep down her shivering alarm. It was long since she had seen him; and the old idea of his kind, genial disposition, had been sadly disturbed by what she had heard from Frank, of his severe proceedings against his unworthy tenantry; and now, if he

was setting the police in search of Edward, he was indeed to be dreaded; and with Edward so close at hand, within earshot! If the china fell! He would suspect nothing from that; it would only be her own terror. If her mother came down! But, with all these thoughts, she was very still, outwardly, as she sat waiting for him to speak.

"Have you heard from your brother lately?" asked he, looking up in an angry and disturbed manner. "But I'll answer for it, he has not been writing home for some time. He could not, with the guilt he has had on his mind. I'll not believe in gratitude again. There perhaps was such a thing once; but nowadays, the more you do for a person, the surer they are to turn against you, and cheat you. Now, don't go white and pale. I know you're a good girl in the main; and I've been lying awake all night, and I've a deal to say to you. That scoundrel of a brother of yours!"

Maggie could not ask (as would have been natural, if she had been ignorant) what Edward had done. She knew too well. But Mr. Buxton was too full of his own thoughts and feelings to notice her much.

"Do you know he has been like the rest? Do you know he has been cheating me—forging my name? I don't know what besides. It's well for him that they've altered the laws, and he can't be hung for it" (a dead heavy weight was removed from Maggie's mind), "but Mr. Henry is going to transport him. It's worse than Crayston. Crayston only ploughed up the turf, and did not pay rent, and sold the timber, thinking I should never miss it. But your brother has gone and forged my name. He had received all the purchase-money, while he only gave me half, and said the rest was to come afterwards. And the ungrateful scoundrel has gone and given a forged receipt! You might have knocked me down with a straw when Mr. Henry told me about it all last night. 'Never talk to me of virtue and such humbug again,' I said, 'I'll never believe in them. Every one is for what he can get.' However, Mr. Henry wrote to the superintendent of police at Woodchester; and has gone over

himself this morning to see after it. But to think of your father having such a son!"

"Oh, my poor father!" sobbed out Maggie. "How glad I am you are dead before this disgrace came upon us!"

"You may well say disgrace. You're a good girl yourself, Maggie. I have always said that. How Edward has turned out as he has done, I cannot conceive. But now, Maggie, I've something to say to you." He moved uneasily about, as if he did not know how to begin. Maggie was standing, leaning her head against the chimney-piece, longing for her visitor to go, dreading the next minute, and wishing to shrink into some dark corner of oblivion where she might forget all for a time, till she regained a small portion of the bodily strength that had been sorely tried of late. Mr. Buxton saw her white look of anguish, and read it in part, but not wholly. He was too intent on what he was going to say.

"I've been lying awake all night, thinking. You see the disgrace it is to you, though you are innocent; and I'm sure you can't think of involving Frank in it."

Maggie went to the little sofa, and, kneeling down by it, hid her face in the cushions. He did not go on, for he thought she was not listening to him. At last he said—

"Come now, be a sensible girl, and face it out. I've a plan to propose."

"I hear," said she in a dull, veiled voice.

"Why, you know how against this engagement I have always been. Frank is but three-and-twenty, and does not know his own mind, as I tell him. Besides, he might marry any one he chose."

"He has chosen me," murmured Maggie.

"Of course, of course. But you'll not think of keeping him to it, after what has passed. You would not have such a fine fellow as Frank pointed at as the brother-in-law of a forger, would you? It was far from what I wished for him before; but now! Why, you're glad your father is dead, rather than he should have lived to see this day; and rightly, too, I think. And you'll not go and disgrace Frank. From

what Mr. Henry hears, Edward has been a discredit to you in many ways. Mr. Henry was at Woodchester yesterday, and he says, if Edward has been fairly entered as an attorney, his name may be struck off the Rolls for many a thing he has done. Think of my Frank having his bright name tarnished by any connection with such a man! Mr. Henry says, even in a court of law what has come out about Edward would be excuse enough for a breach of promise of marriage."

Maggie lifted up her wan face; the pupils of her eyes were dilated, her lips were dead white. She looked straight at Mr. Buxton with indignant impatience—

"Mr. Henry! Mr. Henry! What has Mr. Henry to do with me?"

Mr. Buxton was staggered by the wild, imperious look, so new upon her mild, sweet face. But he was resolute for Frank's sake, and returned to the charge after a moment's pause.

"Mr. Henry is a good friend of mine, who has my interest at heart. He has known what a subject of regret your engagement has been to me; though really my repugnance to it was without cause formerly, compared to what it is now. Now be reasonable, my dear. I'm willing to do something for you if you will do something for me. You must see what a stop this sad affair has put to any thoughts between you and Frank. And you must see what cause I have to wish to punish Edward for his ungrateful behaviour, to say nothing of the forgery. Well, now! I don't know what Mr. Henry will say to me, but I have thought of this. If you'll write a letter to Frank, just saying distinctly that, for reasons which must for ever remain a secret"——

"Remain a secret from Frank?" said Maggie, again lifting up her head. "Why?"

"Why, my dear? You startle me with that manner of yours—just let me finish out my sentence. If you'll say that, for reasons which must for ever remain a secret, you decidedly and unchangeably give up all connection, all

engagement with him (which, in fact, Edward's conduct has as good as put an end to), I'll go over to Woodchester and tell Mr. Henry and the police that they need not make further search after Edward, for that I won't appear against him. You can save your brother; and you'll do yourself no harm by writing this letter, for of course you see your engagement is broken off. For you never would wish to disgrace Frank."

He paused, anxiously awaiting her reply. She did not speak.

"I'm sure, if I appear against him, he is as good as transported," he put in after a while.

Just at this time there was a little sound of displaced china in the closet. Mr. Buxton did not attend to it, but Maggie heard it. She got up, and stood quite calm before Mr. Buxton.

"You must go," said she. "I know you; and I know you are not aware of the cruel way in which you have spoken to me, while asking me to give up the very hope and marrow of my life"—— She could not go on for a moment; she was choked up with anguish.

"It was the truth, Maggie," said he, somewhat abashed.

"It was the truth that made the cruelty of it. But you did not mean to speak cruelly to me, I know. Only it is hard all at once to be called upon to face the shame and blasted character of one who was once an innocent child at the same father's knee."

"I may have spoken too plainly," said Mr. Buxton, "but it was necessary to set the plain truth before you, for my son's sake. You will write the letter I ask?"

Her look was wandering and uncertain. Her attention was distracted by sounds which to him had no meaning; and her judgment she felt was wavering and disturbed.

"I cannot tell. Give me time to think; you will do that, I'm sure. Go now, and leave me alone. If it is right, God will give me strength to do it, and perhaps He will comfort me in my desolation. But I do not know—I cannot

tell. I must have time to think. Go now, if you please, sir," said she imploringly.

"I am sure you will see it is a right thing I ask of you," he persisted.

"Go now," she repeated.

"Very well. In two hours I will come back again; for your sake, time is precious. Even while we speak he may be arrested. At eleven, I will come back."

He went away, leaving her sick and dizzy with the effort to be calm and collected enough to think. She had forgotten for the moment how near Edward was; and started when she saw the closet-door open, and his face put out.

"Is he gone? I thought he never would go. What a time you kept him, Maggie! I was so afraid, once, you might sit down to write the letter in this room; and then I knew he would stop and worry you with interruptions and advice, so that it would never be ended; and my back was almost broken. But you sent him off famously. Why, Maggie! Maggie! you're not going to faint, surely!"

His sudden burst out of a whisper into a loud exclamation of surprise made her rally; but she could not stand. She tried to smile, for he really looked frightened.

"I have been sitting up for many nights; and now this sorrow!" Her smile died away into a wailing, feeble cry.

"Well, well! it's over now, you see. I was frightened enough myself this morning, I own; and then you were brave and kind. But I knew you could save me, all along."

At this moment the door opened, and Mrs. Browne came in.

"Why, Edward, dear! who would have thought of seeing you! This is good of you; what a pleasant surprise! I often said, you might come over for a day from Woodchester. What's the matter, Maggie? you look so fagged. She's losing all her beauty, is not she, Edward? Where's breakfast? I thought I should find all ready. What's the matter? Why don't you speak?" said she, growing anxious at their silence. Maggie left the explanation to Edward.

"Mother," said he, "I've been rather a naughty boy, and got into some trouble; but Maggie is going to help me out of it, like a good sister."

"What is it?" said Mrs. Browne, looking bewildered and uneasy.

"Oh, I took a little liberty with our friend Mr. Buxton's name, and wrote it down to a receipt—that was all."

Mrs. Browne's face showed that the light came but slowly into her mind.

"But that's forgery—is not it?" asked she at length, in terror.

"People call it so," said Edward; "I call it borrowing from an old friend, who was always willing to lend."

"Does he know?—is he angry?" asked Mrs. Browne.

"Yes, he knows, and he blusters a deal. He was working himself up grandly at first. Maggie! I was getting rarely frightened, I can tell you."

"Has he been here?" said Mrs. Browne, in bewildered fright.

"Oh, yes! he and Maggie have been having a long talk, while I was hid in the china-closet. I would not go over that half-hour again for any money. However, he and Maggie came to terms at last."

"No, Edward, we did not!" said Maggie in a low, quivering voice.

"Very nearly. She's to give up her engagement, and then he will let me off."

"Do you mean that Maggie is to give up her engagement to Mr. Frank Buxton?" asked his mother.

"Yes; it would never have come to anything, one might see that. Old Buxton would have held out against it till doomsday. And, sooner or later, Frank would have grown weary. If Maggie had had any spirit, she might have worked him up to marry her before now; and then I should have been spared even this fright, for they would never have set the police after Mrs. Frank Buxton's brother."

"Why, dearest Edward, the police are not after you, are

they?" said Mrs. Browne, for the first time alive to the urgency of the case.

"I believe they are, though," said Edward. "But after what Mr. Buxton promised this morning, it does not signify."

"He did not promise anything," said Maggie.

Edward turned sharply to her, and looked at her. Then he went and took hold of her wrists with no gentle grasp, and spoke to her through his set teeth.

"What do you mean, Maggie—what do you mean?" (giving her a little shake). "Do you mean that you'll stick to your lover, through thick and thin, and leave your brother to be transported? Speak, can't you?"

She looked up at him, and tried to speak, but no words came out of her dry throat. At last she made a strong effort.

"You must give me time to think. I will do what is right, by God's help."

"As if it was not right—and such cant—to save your brother," said he, throwing her hands away in a passionate manner.

"I must be alone," said Maggie, rising, and trying to stand steadily in the reeling room. She heard her mother and Edward speaking, but their words gave her no meaning, and she went out. She was leaving the house by the kitchen door, when she remembered Nancy, left alone and helpless all through this long morning; and, ill as she could endure detention from the solitude she longed to seek, she patiently fulfilled her small duties, and sought out some breakfast for the poor old woman.

When she carried it upstairs, Nancy said—

"There's something up. You've trouble in your sweet face, my darling. Never mind telling me—only don't sob so. I'll pray for you, bairn, and God will help you."

"Thank you, Nancy. Do!" and she left the room.

CHAPTER IX

When she opened the kitchen door, there was the same small, mizzling rain that had obscured the light for weeks, and now it seemed to obscure hope. She clambered slowly (for indeed she was very feeble) up the Fell Lane, and threw herself under the leafless thorn, every small branch and twig of which was loaded with rain-drops. She did not see the well-beloved and familiar landscape, for her tears; and did not miss the hills in the distance that were hidden behind the rain-clouds and sweeping showers.

Mrs. Browne and Edward sat over the fire. He told her his own story: making the temptation strong; the crime a mere trifling, venial error, which he had been led into through his idea that he was to become Mr. Buxton's agent.

"But if it is only that," said Mrs. Browne, "surely Mr. Buxton will not think of going to law with you?"

"It's not merely going to law that he will think of, but trying and transporting me. That Henry he has got for his agent is as sharp as a needle, and as hard as a nether mill-stone. And the fellow has obtained such a hold over Mr. Buxton, that he dare but do what he tells him. I can't imagine how he had so much free-will left as to come with his proposal to Maggie; unless, indeed, Henry knows of it, or, what is most likely of all, has put him up to it. Between them, they have given that poor fool Crayston a pretty dose of it; and I should have come yet worse off if it had not been for Maggie. Let me get clear this time, and I will keep to windward of the law for the future."

"If we sold the cottage we could repay it," said Mrs. Browne, meditating. "Maggie and I could live on very little. But, you see, this property is held in trust for you two."

"Nay, mother! you must not talk of repaying it. Depend upon it he will be so glad to have Frank free from his

engagement that he won't think of asking for the money. And if Mr. Henry says anything about it, we can tell him it's not half the damages they would have had to have given Maggie, if Frank had been extricated in any other way. I wish she would come back; I would prime her a little as to what to say. Keep a look out, mother, lest Mr. Buxton return and find me here."

"I wish Maggie would come in too," said Mrs. Browne. "I'm afraid she'll catch cold this damp day, and then I shall have two to nurse. You think she'll give it up, don't you, Edward? If she does not, I'm afraid of harm coming to you. Had you not better keep out of the way?"

"It's fine talking. Where am I to go out of sight of the police, this wet day: without a shilling in the world, too? If you'll give me some money I'll be off fast enough and make assurance doubly sure. I'm not much afraid of Maggie. She's a little yea-nay thing, and I can always bend her round to what we want. She had better take care, too," said he, with a desperate look on his face, "for by G—— I'll make her give up all thoughts of Frank rather than be taken and tried. Why, it's my chance for all my life; and do you think I'll have it frustrated for a girl's whim!"

"I think it's rather hard upon her, too," pleaded his mother. "She's very fond of him, and it would have been such a good match for her."

"Pooh! she's not nineteen yet, and has plenty of time before her to pick up somebody else; while, don't you see, if I'm caught and transported, I'm done for for life. Besides, I've a notion Frank had already begun to be tired of the affair; it would have been broken off in a month or two, without her gaining anything by it."

"Well, if you think so," replied Mrs. Browne. "But I'm sorry for her. I always told her she was foolish to think so much about him; but I know she'll fret a deal if it's given up."

"Oh! she'll soon comfort herself with thinking that she

has saved me. I wish she'd come. It must be near eleven. I do wish she would come. Hark! is not that the kitchen door?" said he, turning white, and betaking himself once more to the china-closet. He held it ajar till he heard Maggie stepping softly and slowly across the floor. She opened the parlour door and stood looking in, with the strange, imperceptive gaze of a sleep-walker. Then she roused herself, and saw that he was not there; so she came in a step or two, and sat down in her dripping cloak on a chair near the door.

Edward returned, bold, now there was no danger.

"Maggie," said he, "what have you fixed to say to Mr. Buxton?"

She sighed deeply; and then lifted up her large innocent eyes to his face.

"I cannot give up Frank," said she in a low, quiet voice.

Mrs. Browne threw up her hands, and exclaimed in terror—

"Oh, Edward, Edward! go away—I will give you all the plate I have; you can sell it—my darling, go!"

"Not till I have brought Maggie to reason," said he, in a manner as quiet as her own, but with a subdued ferocity in it, which she saw, but which did not intimidate her.

He went up to her, and spoke below his breath.

"Maggie, we were children together—we two—brother and sister of one blood! Do you give me up to be put in prison—in the hulks—among the basest of criminals—I don't know where—all for the sake of your own selfish happiness?"

She trembled very much; but did not speak, or cry, or make any noise.

"You were always selfish. You always thought of yourself. But this time I did think you would have shown how different you could be. But it's self—self—paramount above all."

"Oh, Maggie! how can you be so hard-hearted and selfish?" echoed Mrs. Browne, crying and sobbing.

"Mother!" said Maggie, "I know that I think too often and too much of myself. But this time I thought only of Frank. He loves me; it would break his heart if I wrote as Mr. Buxton wishes, cutting our lives asunder, and giving no reason for it."

"He loves you so," said Edward tauntingly. "A man's love break his heart! You've got some pretty notions! Who told you that he loved you so desperately? How do you know it?"

"Because I love him so," said she, in a quiet, earnest voice. "I do not know of any other reason; but that is quite sufficient to me. I believe him when he says he loves me; and I have no right to cause him the infinite—the terrible pain, which my own heart tells me he would feel, if I did what Mr. Buxton wishes me."

Her manner was so simple and utterly truthful, that it was as quiet and fearless as a child's; her brother's fierce looks of anger had no power over her, and his blustering died away before her into something of the frightened cowardliness he had shown in the morning. But Mrs. Browne came up to Maggie, and took her hand between both of hers, which were trembling. "Maggie, you can save Edward. I know I have not loved you as I should have done; but I will love and comfort you for ever, if you will but write as Mr. Buxton says. Think! Perhaps Mr. Frank may not take you at your word, but may come over and see you, and all may be right, and yet Edward may be saved. It is only writing this letter; you need not stick to it."

"No!" said Edward. "A signature, if you can prove compulsion, is not valid. We will all prove that you write this letter under compulsion; and if Frank loves you so desperately, he won't give you up without a trial to make you change your mind."

"No!" said Maggie firmly. "If I write the letter I abide by it. I will not quibble with my conscience. Edward! I will not marry—I will go and live near you, and come to you whenever I may—and give up my life to you if you are sent to

prison; my mother and I will go, if need be; I do not know yet what I can do, or cannot do, for you, but all I can, I will; but this one thing I cannot."

"Then I'm off!" said Edward. "On your death-bed may you remember this hour, and how you denied your only brother's request. May you ask my forgiveness with your dying breath, and may I be there to deny it you."

"Wait a minute!" said Maggie, springing up rapidly. "Edward, don't curse me with such terrible words till all is done. Mother, I implore you to keep him here. Hide him, do what you can to conceal him. I will have one more trial." She snatched up her bonnet, and was gone before they had time to think or speak to arrest her.

On she flew along the Combehurst road. As she went, the tears fell like rain down her face, and she talked to herself.

"He should not have said so. No; he should not have said so. We were the only two." But still she pressed on, over the thick, wet, brown heather. She saw Mr. Buxton coming; and she went still quicker. The rain had cleared off, and a yellow watery gleam of sunshine was struggling out. She stopped him, or he would have passed her unheeded; little expecting to meet her there.

"I wanted to see you," said she, all at once resuming her composure, and almost assuming a dignified manner. "You must not go down to our house; we have sorrow enough there. Come under these fir-trees, and let me speak to you."

"I hope you have thought of what I said, and are willing to do what I asked you."

"No!" said she. "I have thought and thought. I did not think in a selfish spirit, though they say I did. I prayed first. I could not do that earnestly, and be selfish, I think. I cannot give up Frank. I know the disgrace; and if he, knowing all, thinks fit to give me up, I shall never say a word, but bow my head, and try and live out my appointed days quietly and cheerfully. But he is the judge, not you; nor have I any right to do what you ask me." She stopped, because the agitation took away her breath.

He began in a cold manner: "I am very sorry. The law must take its course. I would have saved my son from the pain of all this knowledge, and that which he will of course feel in the necessity of giving up his engagement. I would have refused to appear against your brother, shamefully ungrateful as he has been. Now, you cannot wonder that I act according to my agent's advice, and prosecute your brother as if he were a stranger."

He turned to go away. He was so cold and determined that for a moment Maggie was timid. But she then laid her hand on his arm.

"Mr. Buxton," said she, "you will not do what you threaten. I know you better. Think! My father was your old friend. That claim is, perhaps, done away with by Edward's conduct. But I do not believe you can forget it always. If you did fulfil the menace you uttered just now, there would come times as you grew older, and life grew fainter and fainter before you—quiet times of thought, when you remembered the days of your youth, and the friends you then had and knew; you would recollect that one of them had left an only son, who had done wrong; who had sinned, sinned against you in his weakness; and you would think then—you could not help it—how you had forgotten mercy in justice; and, as justice required he should be treated as a felon, you threw him among felons; where every glimmering of goodness was darkened for ever. Edward is, after all, more weak than wicked; but he will become wicked if you put him in prison, and have him transported. God is merciful—we cannot tell or think how merciful. Oh, sir, I am so sure you will be merciful, and give my brother, my poor sinning brother, a chance, that I will tell you all. I will throw myself upon your pity. Edward is even now at home, miserable and desperate; my mother is too much stunned to understand all our wretchedness, for very wretched we are in our shame."

As she spoke, the wind arose and shivered in the wiry leaves of the fir-trees, and there was a moaning sound as of

some Ariel imprisoned in the thick branches that, tangled overhead, made a shelter for them. Either the noise or Mr. Buxton's fancy called up an echo to Maggie's voice—a pleading with her pleading—a sad tone of regret, distinct, yet blending with her speech, and a falling, dying sound, as her voice died away in miserable suspense.

It might be that, formed as she was by Mrs. Buxton's care and love, her accents and words were such as that lady, now at rest from all sorrow, would have used; somehow, at any rate, the thought flashed into Mr. Buxton's mind that, as Maggie spoke, his dead wife's voice was heard, imploring mercy in a clear, distinct tone, though faint, as if separated from him by an infinite distance of space. At least, this is the account Mr. Buxton would have given of the manner in which the idea of his wife became present to him, and what she would have wished him to do a powerful motive in his conduct. Words of hers, long ago spoken, and merciful, forgiving expressions, made use of in former days to soften him in some angry mood, were clearly remembered while Maggie spoke; and their influence was perceptible in the change of his tone and the wavering of his manner henceforward.

"And yet you will not save Frank from being involved in your disgrace," said he; but more as if weighing and deliberating on the case than he had ever spoken before.

"If Frank wishes it, I will quietly withdraw myself out of his sight for ever; I give you my promise, before God, to do so. I shall not utter one word of entreaty or complaint. I will try not to wonder or feel surprise; I will bless him in every action of his future life; but think how different would be the disgrace he would voluntarily incur, to my poor mother's shame, when she wakens up to know what her child has done! Her very torpor about it now is more painful than words can tell."

"What could Edward do?" asked Mr. Buxton. "Mr. Henry won't hear of my passing over any frauds."

"Oh, you relent!" said Maggie, taking his hand, and

pressing it. "What could he do? He could do the same, whatever it was, as you thought of his doing, if I had written that terrible letter."

"And you'll be willing to give it up, if Frank wishes, when he knows all?" asked Mr. Buxton.

She crossed her hands and dropped her head, but answered steadily—

"Whatever Frank wishes, when he knows all, I will gladly do. I will speak the truth. I do not believe that any shame surrounding me, and not in me, will alter Frank's love one tittle."

"We shall see," said Mr. Buxton. "But what I thought of Edward's doing, in case——Well, never mind!" (seeing how she shrunk back from all mention of the letter he had asked her to write)—"was to go to America out of the way. Then Mr. Henry would think he had escaped, and need never be told of my connivance. I think he would throw up the agency if he were; and he's a very clever man. If Ned is in England, Mr. Henry will ferret him out. And, besides, this affair is so blown, I don't think he could return to his profession. What do you say to this, Maggie?"

"I will tell my mother. I must ask her. To me it seems most desirable. Only, I fear he is very ill; and it seems lonely; but never mind! We ought to be thankful to you for ever. I cannot tell you how I hope and trust he will live to show you what your goodness has made him."

"But you must lose no time. If Mr. Henry traces him, I can't answer for myself. I shall have no good reason to give, as I should have had, if I could have told him that Frank and you were to be as strangers to each other. And even then I should have been afraid, he is such a determined fellow; but uncommonly clever. Stay!" said he, yielding to a sudden and inexplicable desire to see Edward, and discover if his criminality had in any way changed his outward appearance. "I'll go with you. I can hasten things. If Edward goes, he must be off, as soon as possible, to

Liverpool, and leave no trace. The next packet sails the day after to-morrow. I noted it down from the *Times*."

Maggie and he sped along the road. He spoke his thoughts aloud—

"I wonder if he will be grateful to me for this. Not that I ever mean to look for gratitude again. I mean to try not to care for anybody but Frank. 'Govern men by outward force,' says Mr. Henry. He is an uncommonly clever man; and he says, the longer he lives, the more he is convinced of the badness of men. He always looks for it now, even in those who are the best apparently."

Maggie was too anxious to answer, or even to attend to him. At the top of the slope she asked him to wait while she ran down and told the result of her conversation with him. Her mother was alone, looking white and sick. She told her that Edward had gone into the hay-loft, above the old, disused shippen.

Maggie related the substance of her interview with Mr. Buxton, and his wish that Edward should go to America.

"To America!" said Mrs. Browne. "Why, that's as far as Botany Bay. It's just like transporting him. I thought you'd done something for us, you looked so glad."

"Dearest mother, it *is* something. He is not to be subjected to imprisonment nor trial. I must go and tell him, only I must beckon to Mr. Buxton first. But when he comes, do show him how thankful we are for his mercy to Edward."

Mrs. Browne's murmurings, whatever was their meaning, were lost upon Maggie. She ran through the court, and up the slope, with the lightness of a fawn; for though she was tired in body to an excess she had never been before in her life, the opening beam of hope in the dark sky made her spirit conquer her flesh for the time.

She did not stop to speak, but turned again as soon as she had signed to Mr. Buxton to follow her. She left the house-door open for his entrance, and passed out again through the kitchen into the space behind, which was partly

an unenclosed yard, and partly rocky common. She ran across the little green to the shippen, and mounted the ladder into the dimly lighted loft. Up in a dark corner Edward stood, with an old rake in his hand.

"I thought it was you, Maggie!" said he, heaving a deep breath of relief. "What have you done? Have you agreed to write the letter? You've done something for me, I see, by your looks."

"Yes; I have told Mr. Buxton all. He is waiting for you in the parlour. Oh! I knew he could not be so hard!" She was out of breath.

"I don't understand you!" said he. "You've never been such a fool as to go and tell him where I am?"

"Yes, I have. I felt I might trust him. He has promised not to prosecute you. The worst is, he says you must go to America. But come down, Ned, and speak to him. You owe him thanks, and he wants to see you."

"I can't go through a scene. I'm not up to it. Besides, are you sure he is not entrapping me to the police? If I had a farthing of money I would not trust him, but be off to the moors."

"Oh, Edward! How do you think he would do anything so treacherous and mean! I beg you not to lose time in distrust. He says himself, if Mr. Henry comes before you are off, he does not know what will be the consequence. The packet sails for America in two days. It is sad for you to have to go. Perhaps even yet he may think of something better, though I don't know how we can ask or expect it."

"I don't want anything better," replied he, "than that I should have money enough to carry me to America. I'm in more scrapes than this (though none so bad) in England; and in America there's many an opening to fortune."

He followed her down the steps while he spoke. Once in the yellow light of the watery day, she was struck by his ghastly look. Sharp lines of suspicion and cunning seemed to have been stamped upon his face, making it look older by many years than his age warranted. His jaunty evening

dress, all weather-stained and dirty, added to his forlorn and disreputable appearance; but most of all—deepest of all—was the impression she received that he was not long for this world; and oh, how unfit for the next! Still, if time was given—if he were placed far away from temptation—she thought that her father's son might yet repent, and be saved. She took his hand, for he was hanging back as they came near the parlour-door, and led him in. She looked like some guardian angel, with her face that beamed out trust, and hope, and thankfulness. He, on the contrary, hung his head in angry, awkward shame, and half wished he had trusted to his own wits, and tried to evade the police, rather than have been forced into this interview.

His mother came to him; for she loved him all the more fondly, now he seemed degraded and friendless. She could not, or would not, comprehend the extent of his guilt; and had upbraided Mr. Buxton to the top of her bent for thinking of sending him away to America. There was a silence when he came in which was insupportable to him. He looked up with clouded eyes, that dared not meet Mr. Buxton's.

"I am here, sir, to learn what you wish me to do. Maggie says I am to go to America: if that is where you want to send me, I'm ready."

Mr. Buxton wished himself away as heartily as Edward. Mrs. Browne's upbraidings, just when he felt that he had done a kind action, and yielded, against his judgment, to Maggie's entreaties, had made him think himself very ill-used. And now here was Edward speaking in a sullen, savage kind of way, instead of showing any gratitude. The idea of Mr. Henry's stern displeasure loomed in the background.

"Yes," said he; "I'm glad to find you come into the idea of going to America. It's the only place for you. The sooner you can go, the better."

"I can't go without money," said Edward doggedly. "If I had had money, I need not have come here."

"Oh, Ned! would you have gone without seeing me?"

said Mrs. Browne, bursting into tears. "Mr. Buxton, I cannot let him go to America. Look how ill he is. He'll die if you send him there."

"Mother, don't give way so," said Edward kindly, taking her hand. "I'm not ill, at least not to signify. Mr. Buxton is right: America is the only place for me. To tell the truth, even if Mr. Buxton is good enough" (he said this as if unwilling to express any word of thankfulness) "not to prosecute me, there are others who may—and will. I'm safer out of the country. Give me money enough to get to Liverpool and pay my passage, and I'll be off this minute."

"You shall not," said Mrs. Browne, holding him tightly. "You told me this morning you were led into temptation, and went wrong because you had no comfortable home, nor any one to care for you, and make you happy. It will be worse in America. You'll get wrong again, and be away from all who can help you. Or you'll die all by yourself, in some backwood or other. Maggie! you might speak and help me—how can you stand so still, and let him go to America without a word!"

Maggie looked up bright and steadfast, as if she saw something beyond the material present. Here was the opportunity for self-sacrifice of which Mrs. Buxton had spoken to her in her childish days—the time which comes to all, but comes unheeded and unseen to those whose eyes are not trained to watching.

"Mother! could you do without me for a time? If you could, and it would make you easier, and help Edward to" —— The word on her lips died away; for it seemed to imply a reproach on one who stood in his shame among them all.

"You would go!" said Mrs. Browne, catching at the unfinished sentence. "Oh! Maggie, that's the best thing you've ever said or done since you were born. Edward, would not you like to have Maggie with you?"

"Yes," said he, "well enough. It would be far better for me than going all alone; though I dare say I could make

my way pretty well after a time. If she went, she might stay till I felt settled, and had made some friends, and then she could come back."

Mr. Buxton was astonished at first by this proposal of Maggie's. He could not all at once understand the difference between what she now offered to do, and what he had urged upon her only this very morning. But as he thought about it, he perceived that what was her own she was willing to sacrifice; but that Frank's heart once given into her faithful keeping, she was answerable for it to him and to God. This light came down upon him slowly; but when he understood, he admired with almost a wondering admiration. That little timid girl, brave enough to cross the ocean and go to a foreign land, if she could only help to save her brother!

"I'm sure, Maggie," said he, turning towards her, "you are a good, thoughtful little creature. It may be the saving of Edward—I believe it will. I think God will bless you for being so devoted."

"The expense will be doubled," said Edward.

"My dear boy! never mind the money. I can get it advanced upon this cottage."

"As for that, I'll advance it," said Mr. Buxton.

"Could we not," said Maggie, hesitating from her want of knowledge, "make over the furniture, papa's books, and what little plate we have, to Mr. Buxton—something like pawning them—if he would advance the requisite money? He, strange as it may seem, is the only person you can ask in this great strait."

And so it was arranged, after some demur on Mr. Buxton's part. But Maggie kept steadily to her point as soon as she found that it was attainable; and Mrs. Browne was equally inflexible, though from a different feeling. She regarded Mr. Buxton as the cause of her son's banishment, and refused to accept any favour from him. If there had been time, indeed, she would have preferred obtaining the money in the same manner from any one else. Edward brightened up a little when he heard the sum could be procured; he was

almost indifferent how; and, strangely callous, as Maggie thought, he even proposed to draw up a legal form of assignment. Mr. Buxton only thought of hurrying on the departure; but he could not refrain from expressing his approval and admiration of Maggie whenever he came near her. Before he went, he called her aside.

"My dear, I'm not sure if Frank can do better than marry you, after all. Mind! I've not given it as much thought as I should like. But if you come back as we plan, next autumn, and he is steady to you till then—and Edward is going on well (if he can but keep good, he'll do, for he is very sharp—yon is a knowing paper he drew up)—why, I'll think about it. Only let Frank see a bit of the world first. I'd rather you did not tell him I've any thoughts of coming round, that he may have a fair trial; and I'll keep it from Erminia if I can, or she will let it all out to him. I shall see you to-morrow at the coach. God bless you, my girl, and keep you on the great wide sea." He was absolutely in tears when he went away—tears of admiring regret over Maggie.

CHAPTER X

The more Maggie thought, the more she felt sure that the impulse on which she had acted in proposing to go with her brother was right. She feared there was little hope for his character, whatever there might be for his worldly fortune, if he were thrown, in the condition of mind in which he was now, among the set of adventurous men who are continually going over to America in search of an El Dorado to be discovered by their wits. She knew she had but little influence over him at present; but she would not doubt or waver in her hope that patience and love might work him right at last. She meant to get some employment—in teaching—in

needlework—in a shop—no matter how humble—and be no burden to him, and make him a happy home, from which he should feel no wish to wander. Her chief anxiety was about her mother. She did not dwell more than she could help on her long absence from Frank; it was too sad, and yet too necessary. She meant to write and tell him all about herself and Edward. The only thing which she would keep for some happy future, should be the possible revelation of the proposal which Mr. Buxton had made, that she should give up her engagement as a condition of his not prosecuting Edward.

There was much sorrowful bustle in the moorland cottage that day. Erminia brought up a portion of the money Mr. Buxton was to advance, with an entreaty that Edward would not show himself out of his home; and an account of a letter from Mr. Henry stating that the Woodchester police believed him to be in London, and that search was being made for him there.

Erminia looked very grave and pale. She gave her message to Mrs. Browne, speaking little beyond what was absolutely necessary. Then she took Maggie aside, and suddenly burst into tears.

"Maggie, darling—what is this going to America? You've always and always been sacrificing yourself to your family, and now you're setting off, nobody knows where, in some vain hope of reforming Edward. I wish he was not your brother, that I might speak of him as I should like."

"He has been doing what is very wrong," said Maggie. "But you—none of you—know his good points—nor how he has been exposed to all sorts of bad influences, I am sure; and never had the advantage of a father's training and friendship, which are so inestimable to a son. O Minnie, when I remember how we two used to kneel down in the evenings at my father's knee and say our prayers; and then listen in awe-struck silence to his earnest blessing, which grew more like a prayer for us as his life waned away; I would do anything for Edward rather than that wrestling

agony of supplication should have been in vain. I think of him as the little innocent boy, whose arm was round me as if to support me in the Awful Presence, whose true name of Love we had not learned. Minnie! he has had no proper training—no training, I mean, to enable him to resist temptation; and he has been thrown into it without warning or advice. Now he knows what it is; and I must try, though I am but an unknowing girl, to warn and to strengthen him. Don't weaken my faith. Who can do right if we lose faith in them?"

"And Frank!" said Erminia, after a pause. "Poor Frank!"

"Dear Frank!" replied Maggie, looking up, and trying to smile; but, in spite of herself, her eyes filled with tears. "If I could have asked him, I know he would approve of what I am going to do. He would feel it to be right that I should make every effort—I don't mean," said she, as the tears would fall down her cheeks in spite of her quivering efforts at a smile, "that I should not have liked to have seen him. But it is of no use talking of what one would have liked. I am writing a long letter to him at every pause of leisure."

"And I'm keeping you all this time," said Erminia, getting up, yet loth to go. "When do you intend to come back? Let us feel there is a fixed time. America! Why, it's thousands of miles away. Oh, Maggie! Maggie!"

"I shall come back the next autumn, I trust," said Maggie, comforting her friend with many a soft caress. "Edward will be settled then, I hope. You were longer in France, Minnie. Frank was longer away that time he wintered in Italy with Mr. Monro."

Erminia went slowly to the door. Then she turned, right facing Maggie.

"Maggie! tell the truth. Has my uncle been urging you to go? Because if he has, don't trust him; it is only to break off your engagement."

"No, he has not, indeed. It was my own thought at

first. Then in a moment I saw the relief it was to my mother—my poor mother! Erminia, the thought of her grief at Edward's absence is the trial; for my sake, you will come often and often, and comfort her in every way you can."

"Yes; that I will—tell me everything I can do for you." Kissing each other, with long, lingering delay, they parted.

Nancy would be informed of the cause of the commotion in the house; and when she had in some degree ascertained its nature, she wasted no time in asking further questions, but quietly got up and dressed herself; and appeared among them, weak and trembling, indeed, but so calm and thoughtful, that her presence was an infinite help to Maggie.

When day closed in, Edward stole down to the house once more. He was haggard enough to have been in anxiety and concealment for a month. But when his body was refreshed his spirits rose in a way inconceivable to Maggie. The Spaniards who went out with Pizarro were not lured on by more fantastic notions of the wealth to be acquired in the New World than he was. He dwelt on these visions in so brisk and vivid a manner, that he even made his mother cease her weary weeping (which had lasted the livelong day, despite all Maggie's efforts), to look up and listen to him.

"I'll answer for it," said he, "before long I'll be an American judge, with miles of cotton plantations."

"But in America," sighed out his mother.

"Never mind, mother!" said he, with a tenderness which made Maggie's heart glad. "If you won't come over to America to me, why, I'll sell them all and come back to live in England. People will forget the scrapes that the rich American got into in his youth."

"You can pay back Mr. Buxton then," said his mother.

"Oh yes, of course," replied he, as if falling into a new and trivial idea.

Thus the evening whiled away. The mother and son sat, hand in hand, before the little glinting, blazing parlour fire, with the unlighted candles on the table behind. Maggie, busy in preparations, passed softly in and out. And when all was done that could be done before going to Liverpool, where she hoped to have two days to prepare their outfit more completely, she stole back to her mother's side. But her thoughts would wander off to Frank, "working his way south through all the hunting-counties", as he had written her word. If she had not urged his absence, he would have been here for her to see his noble face once more; but then perhaps she might never have had the strength to go.

Late, late in the night, they separated. Maggie could not rest, and stole into her mother's room. Mrs. Browne had cried herself to sleep, like a child. Maggie stood and looked at her face, and then knelt down by the bed and prayed. When she arose, she saw that her mother was awake, and had been looking at her.

"Maggie, dear! you're a good girl, and I think God will hear your prayer, whatever it was for. I cannot tell you what a relief it is to me to think you're going with him. It would have broken my heart else. If I've sometimes not been as kind as I might have been, I ask your forgiveness now, my dear; and I bless you and thank you for going out with him; for I'm sure he's not well and strong, and will need somebody to take care of him. And you shan't lose with Mr. Frank, for as sure as I see him I'll tell him what a good daughter and sister you've been; and I shall say, for all he is so rich, I think he may look long before he finds a wife for him like our Maggie. I do wish Ned had got that new greatcoat he says he left behind him at Woodchester."

Her mind reverted to her darling son; but Maggie took her short slumber by her mother's side, with her mother's arms around her, and awoke and felt that her sleep had been blessed. At the coach-office the next morning they met Mr.

Buxton, all ready as if for a journey, but glancing about him as if in fear of some coming enemy.

"I'm going with you to Liverpool," said he. "Don't make any ado about it, please. I shall like to see you off, and I may be of some use to you, and Erminia begged it of me; and, besides, it will keep me out of Mr. Henry's way for a little time, and I'm afraid he will find it all out, and think me very weak; but, you see, he made me too hard upon Crayston, so I may take it out in a little soft-heartedness towards the son of an old friend."

Just at this moment Erminia came running through the white morning mist all glowing with haste.

"Maggie," said she, "I'm come to take care of your mother. My uncle says she and Nancy must come to us for a long, long visit. Or if she would rather go home, I'll go with her till she feels able to come to us, and do anything I can think of for her. I will try to be a daughter till you come back, Maggie; only don't be long, or Frank and I shall break our hearts."

Maggie waited till her mother had ended her long clasping embrace of Edward, who was subdued enough this morning; and then, with something like Esau's craving for a blessing, she came to bid her mother "good-bye," and received the warm caress she had longed for for years. In another moment the coach was away, and before half-an-hour had elapsed, Combehurst church-spire had been lost in a turn of the road.

Edward and Mr. Buxton did not speak to each other, and Maggie was nearly silent. They reached Liverpool in the afternoon; and Mr. Buxton, who had been there once or twice before, took them directly to some quiet hotel. He was far more anxious that Edward should not expose himself to any chance of recognition than Edward himself. He went down to the Docks to secure berths in the vessel about to sail the next day, and on his return he took Maggie out to make the requisite purchases.

"Did you pay for us, sir?" said Maggie, anxious to

ascertain the amount of money she had left, after defraying the passage.

"Yes," replied he, rather confused. "Erminia begged me not to tell you about it, but I can't manage a secret well. You see, she did not like the idea of your going as steerage-passengers as you meant to do, and she desired me to take you cabin places for her. It is no doing of mine, my dear. I did not think of it; but now I have seen how crowded the steerage is, I am very glad Erminia had so much thought. Edward might have roughed it well enough there, but it would never have done for you."

"It was very kind of Erminia," said Maggie, touched at this consideration of her friend; "but"——

"Now don't 'but' about it," interrupted he. "Erminia is very rich, and has more money than she knows what to do with. I'm only vexed I did not think of it myself. For, Maggie, though I may have my own ways of thinking on some points, I can't be blind to your goodness."

All evening Mr. Buxton was busy, and busy on their behalf. Even Edward when he saw the attention that was being paid to his physical comfort, felt a kind of penitence; and, after choking once or twice in the attempt, conquered his pride (such I call it for want of a better word) so far as to express some regret for his past conduct, and some gratitude for Mr. Buxton's present kindness. He did it awkwardly enough, but it pleased Mr. Buxton.

"Well—well—that's all very right," said he, reddening from his own uncomfortableness of feeling. "Now don't say any more about it, but do your best in America; don't let me feel I've been a fool in letting you off. I know Mr. Henry will think me so. And, above all, take care of Maggie. Mind what she says, and you're sure to go right."

He asked them to go on board early the next day, as he had promised Erminia to see them there, and yet wished to return as soon as he could. It was evident that he hoped, by making his absence as short as possible, to prevent Mr.

Henry's ever knowing that he had left home, or in any way connived at Edward's escape.

So, although the vessel was not to sail till the afternoon's tide, they left the hotel soon after breakfast, and went to the *Anna-Maria*. They were among the first passengers on board. Mr. Buxton took Maggie down to her cabin. She then saw the reason of his business the evening before. Every store that could be provided was there. A number of books lay on the little table—books just suited to Maggie's taste. "There!" said he rubbing his hands. "Don't thank me. It's all Erminia's doing. She gave me the list of books. I've not got all; but I think they'll be enough. Just write me one line, Maggie, to say I've done my best."

Maggie wrote with tears in her eyes—tears of love towards the generous Erminia. A few minutes more and Mr. Buxton was gone. Maggie watched him as long as she could see him; and, as his portly figure disappeared among the crowd on the pier, her heart sank within her.

Edward's, on the contrary, rose at his absence. The only one cognisant of his shame and ill-doing was gone. A new life lay before him, the opening of which was made agreeable to him by the position in which he found himself placed, as a cabin-passenger, with many comforts provided for him; for although Maggie's wants had been the principal object of Mr. Buxton's attention, Edward was not forgotten.

He was soon among the sailors, talking away in rather a consequential manner. He grew acquainted with the remainder of the cabin-passengers, at least those who arrived before the final bustle began; and kept bringing his sister such little pieces of news as he could collect.

"Maggie, they say we are likely to have a good start, and a fine moonlight night." Away again he went.

"I say, Maggie, there's an uncommonly pretty girl come on board with those old people in black. Gone down into the cabin now; I wish you would scrape up an acquaintance with her, and give me a chance."

CHAPTER XI

Maggie sat on deck, wrapped in her duffel-cloak—the old familiar cloak which had been her wrap in many a happy walk in the haunts near her moorland home. The weather was not cold for the time of year, but still it was chilly to any one that was stationary. But she wanted to look her last on the shoals of English people, who crowded backwards and forwards, like ants, on the pier. Happy people, who might stay among their loved ones! The mocking dæmons gathered round her, as they gather round all who sacrifice self, tempting. A crowd of suggestive doubts pressed upon her. "Was it really necessary that she should go with Edward? Could she do him any real good? Would he be in any way influenced by her?" Then the dæmon tried another description of doubt. "Had it ever been her duty to go? She was leaving her mother alone. She was giving Frank much present sorrow. It was not even yet too late!" She could not endure longer, and replied to her own tempting heart—

"I was right to hope for Edward; I am right to give him the chance of steadiness which my presence will give. I am doing what my mother earnestly wish me to do, and what to the last she felt relieved by my doing. I know Frank will feel sorrow, because I myself have such an aching heart; but if I had asked him whether I was not right in going, he would have been too truthful not to have said 'yes.' I have tried to do right, and though I may fail, and evil may seem to arise rather than good out of my endeavour, yet still I will submit to my failure, and try and say 'God's will be done!" If only I might have seen Frank once more, and told him all face to face!"

To do away with such thoughts, she determined no longer to sit gazing, and tempted by the shore; and, giving one look to the land which contained her lover, she went down below,

and busied herself, even through her blinding tears, in trying to arrange her own cabin, and Edward's. She heard boat after boat arrive, loaded with passengers. She learnt from Edward, who came down to tell her the fact, that there were upwards of two hundred steerage passengers. She felt the tremulous shake which announced that the ship was loosed from her moorings, and being tugged down the river. She wrapped herself up once more, and came on deck, and sat down among the many who were looking their last at England. The early winter evening was darkening in, and shutting out the Welsh coast, the hills of which were like the hills of home. She was thankful when she became too ill to think and remember.

Exhausted and still, she did not know whether she was sleeping or waking; or whether she had slept, since she had thrown herself down on her cot; when, suddenly, there was a great rush, and then Edward stood like lightning by her, pulling her up by the arm.

"The ship is on fire—to the deck, Maggie! Fire! Fire!" he shouted, like a maniac, while he dragged her up the stairs—as if the cry of "Fire" could summon human aid on the great deep. And the cry was echoed up to heaven by all that crowd, in an accent of despair.

They stood huddled together, dressed and undressed; now in red lurid light, showing ghastly faces of terror—now in white wreaths of smoke—as far away from the steerage as they could press; for there, up from the hold, rose columns of smoke, and now and then a fierce blaze leaped out, exulting—higher and higher every time; while from each crevice on that part of the deck issued harbingers of the terrible destruction that awaited them.

The sailors were lowering the boats; and above them stood the captain, as calm as if he were on his own hearth at home—his home where he never more should be. His voice was low—was lower; but as clear as a bell in its distinctness; as wise in its directions as collected thought could make it. Some of the steerage passengers were helping;

but more were dumb and motionless with affright. In that dead silence was heard a low wail of sorrow, as of numbers whose power was crushed out of them by that awful terror. Edward still held his clutch of Margaret's arm.

"Be ready!" said he in a fierce whisper.

The fire sprung up along the main-mast, and did not sink or disappear-again. They knew, then, that all the mad efforts made by some few below to extinguish it were in vain; and then went up the prayers of hundreds, in mortal agony of fear—

"Lord! have mercy upon us!"

Not in quiet calm of village church did ever such a pitiful cry go up to heaven; it was like one voice—like the day of judgment in the presence of the Lord.

And after that there was no more silence; but a confusion of terrible farewells, and wild cries of affright, and purposeless rushes hither and thither.

The boats were down, rocking on the sea. The captain spoke—

"Put the children in first; they are the most helpless."

One or two stout sailors stood in the boats to receive them. Edward drew nearer and nearer to the gangway, pulling Maggie with him. She was almost pressed to death, and stifled. Close in her ear, she heard a woman praying to herself. She, poor creature, knew of no presence but God's in that awful hour, and spoke in a low voice to Him.

"My heart's darlings are taken away from me. Faith! faith! Oh, my great God! I will die in peace, if Thou wilt but grant me faith in this terrible hour, to feel that Thou wilt take care of my poor orphans. Hush! dearest Billy," she cried out shrill to a little fellow in the boat, waiting for his mother; and the change in her voice, from despair to a kind of cheerfulness, showed what a mother's love can do. "Mother will come soon. Hide his face, Anne, and wrap your shawl tight round him." And then her voice sank down again, in the same low, wild prayer for faith. Maggie could not turn to see her face, but took the hand which hung

near her. The woman clutched at it with the grasp of a vice; but went on praying, as if unconscious. Just then the crowd gave way a little. The captain had said that the women were to go next; but they were too frenzied to obey his directions, and now pressed backward and forward. The sailors, with mute, stern obedience, strove to follow out the captain's directions. Edward pulled Maggie, and she kept her hold on the mother. The mate, at the head of the gangway, pushed him back.

"Only women are to go!"

"There are men there."

"Three, to manage the boat."

"Come on, Maggie! while there's room for us," said he, unheeding. But Maggie drew back, and put the mother's hand into the mate's. "Save her first," said she. The woman did not know of anything, but that her children were there; it was only in after days, and quiet hours, that she remembered the young creature who pushed her forwards to join her fatherless children, and, by losing her place in the crowd, was jostled—where she did not know, but dreamed until her dying day. Edward pressed on, unaware that Maggie was not close behind him. He was deaf to reproaches; and, heedless of the hand stretched out to hold him back, sprang towards the boat. The men there pushed her off—full, and more than full, as she was; and overboard he fell into the sullen heaving waters.

His last shout had been on Maggie's name—a name she never thought to hear again on earth, as she was pressed back, sick and suffocating. But suddenly a voice rang out above all confused voices and moaning hungry waves, and above the roaring fire.

"Maggie, Maggie! My Maggie!"

Out of the steerage side of the crowd a tall figure issued forth, begrimed with smoke. She could not see, but she knew. As a tame bird flutters to the human breast of its protector when affrighted by some mortal foe, so Maggie fluttered and cowered into his arms. And, for a moment,

there was no more terror or thought of danger in the hearts of those twain, but only infinite and absolute peace. She had no wonder how he came there: it was enough that he was there. He first thought of the destruction that was present with them. He was as calm and composed as if they sat beneath the thorn-tree on the still moorlands, far away. He took her, without a word, to the end of the quarter-deck. He lashed her to a piece of spar. She never spoke.

"Maggie," he said, "my only chance is to throw you overboard. This spar will keep you floating. At first, you will go down—deep, deep down. Keep your mouth and eyes shut. I shall be there when you come up. By God's help, I will struggle bravely for you."

She looked up; and by the flashing light he could see a trusting, loving smile upon her face. And he smiled back at her: a grave, beautiful look, fit to wear on his face in heaven. He helped her to the side of the vessel, away from the falling burning pieces of mast. Then for a moment he paused.

"If——Maggie, I may be throwing you in to death." He put his hand before his eyes. The strong man lost courage. Then she spoke—

"I am not afraid; God is with us, whether we live or die!" She looked as quiet and happy as a child on its mother's breast; and so, before he lost heart again, he heaved her up, and threw her as far as he could over into the glaring, dizzying water; and straight leaped after her. She came up with an involuntary look of terror on her face; but when she saw him by the red glare of the burning ship close by her side, she shut her eyes, and looked as if peacefully going to sleep. He swam, guiding the spar.

"I think we are near Llandudno. I know we have passed the Little Ormes' head." That was all he said; but she did not speak.

He swam out of the heat and fierce blaze of light into the quiet dark waters; and then into the moon's path. It might

be half-an-hour before he got into that silver stream. When the beams fell down upon them he looked at Maggie. Her head rested on the spar, quite still. He could not bear it. "Maggie—dear heart! speak!"

With a great effort she was called back from the borders of death by that voice, and opened her filmy eyes, which looked abroad as if she could see nothing nearer than the gleaming lights of heaven. She let the lids fall softly again. He was as if alone in the wide world with God.

"A quarter of an hour more and all is over," thought he. "The people at Llandudno must see our burning ship, and will come out in their boats." He kept in the line of light, although it did not lead him direct to the shore, in order that they might be seen. He swam with desperation. One moment he thought he had heard her last gasp rattle through the rush of the waters; and all strength was gone, and he lay on the waves as if he himself must die, and go with her spirit straight through that purple lift to heaven; the next he heard the splash of oars, and raised himself and cried aloud. The boatmen took them in, and examined her by the lantern—and spoke in Welsh—and shook their heads. Frank threw himself on his knees, and prayed them to take her to land. They did not know his words, but they understood his prayer. He kissed her lips, he chafed her hands, he wrung the water out of her hair, he held her feet against his warm breast.

"She is not dead," he kept saying to the men, as he saw their sorrowful, pitying looks.

The kind people at Llandudno had made ready their own humble beds, with every appliance of comfort they could think of, as soon as they understood the nature of the calamity which had befallen the ship on their coasts. Frank walked, dripping, bareheaded, by the body of his Margaret, which was borne by some men along the rocky, sloping shore.

"She is not dead!" he said. He stopped at the first house they came to. It belonged to a kind-hearted woman.

They laid Maggie in her bed, and got the village doctor to come and see her.

"There is life still," said he gravely.

"I knew it," said Frank. But it felled him to the ground. He sank first in prayer, and then in insensibility. The doctor did everything. All that night long he passed to and fro from house to house; for several had swum to Llandudno. Others, it was thought, had gone to Abergele.

In the morning Frank was recovered enough to write to his father, by Maggie's bedside. He sent the letter off to Conway by a little bright-looking Welsh boy. Late in the afternoon she awoke.

In a moment or two she looked eagerly round her, as if gathering in her breath; and then she covered her head and sobbed.

"Where is Edward?" asked she.

"We do not know," said Frank gravely. "I have been round the village, and seen every survivor here; he is not among them, but he may be at some other place along the coast."

She was silent, reading in his eyes his fears—his belief. At last she asked again.

"I cannot understand it. My head is not clear. There are such rushing noises in it. How came you there?" She shuddered involuntarily as she recalled the terrible where.

For an instant he dreaded, for her sake, to recall the circumstances of the night before; but then he understood how her mind would dwell upon them until she was satisfied.

"You remember writing to me, love, telling me all. I got your letter—I don't know how long ago—yesterday, I think. Yes! in the evening. You could not think, Maggie, I would let you go alone to America. I won't speak against Edward, poor fellow! but we must both allow that he was not the person to watch over you, as such a treasure should be watched over. I thought I would go with you; I hardly know if I meant to make myself known

to you all at once, for I had no wish to have much to do with your brother. I see now that it was selfish in me. Well! there was nothing to be done, after receiving your letter, but to set off for Liverpool straight, and join you. And after that decision was made, my spirits rose, for the old talks about Canada and Australia came to my mind, and this seemed like a realisation of them. Besides, Maggie, I suspected—I even suspect now—that my father had something to do with your going with Edward?"

"Indeed, Frank!" said she earnestly, "you are mistaken; I cannot tell you all now; but he was so good and kind at last. He never urged me to go; though, I believe, he did tell me it would be the saving of Edward."

"Don't agitate yourself, love. I trust there will be time enough, some happy day at home, to tell me all. And till then, I will believe that my father did not in any way suggest this voyage. But you'll allow that, after all that has passed, it was not unnatural in me to suppose so. I only told Middleton I was obliged to leave him by the next train. It was not till I was fairly off, that I began to reckon up what money I had with me. I doubt even if I was sorry to find it was so little. I should have to put forth my energies and fight my way, as I had often wanted to do. I remember, I thought how happy you and I would be, striving together as poor people 'in that new world which is the old.' Then you had told me you were going in the steerage, and that was all suitable to my desires for myself."

"It was Erminia's kindness that prevented our going there. She asked your father to take us cabin places unknown to me."

"Did she? Dear Erminia! it is just like her. I could almost laugh to remember the eagerness with which I doffed my signs of wealth, and put on those of poverty. I sold my watch when I got into Liverpool—yesterday, I believe—but it seems like months ago. And I rigged myself out at a slop-shop with suitable clothes for a steerage passenger.

Maggie! you never told me the name of the vessel you were going to sail in!"

"I did not know it till I got to Liverpool. All Mr. Buxton said was that some ship sailed on the 15th."

"I concluded it must be the *Anna-Maria* (poor *Anna-Maria!*) and I had no time to lose. She had just heaved her anchor when I came on board. Don't you recollect a boat hailing her at the last moment? There were three of us in her."

"No; I was below in my cabin—trying not to think," said she, colouring a little.

"Well! as soon as I got on board it began to grow dark, or, perhaps, it was the fog on the river; at any rate, instead of being able to single out your figure at once, Maggie—it is one among a thousand—I had to go peering into every woman's face, and many were below. I went between decks, and by-and-by I was afraid I had mistaken the vessel; I sat down; I had no spirit to stand; and every time the door opened I roused up and looked—but you never came. I was thinking what to do; whether to be put on shore in Ireland, or to go on to New York, and wait for you there; it was the worst time of all, for I had nothing to do, and the suspense was horrible. I might have known," said he, smiling, "my little Emperor of Russia was not one to be a steerage passenger."

But Maggie was too much shaken to smile, and the thought of Edward lay heavy upon her mind.

"Then the fire broke out; how, or why, I suppose, will never be ascertained. It was at our end of the vessel. I thanked God, then, that you were not there. The second mate wanted some one to go down with him to bring up the gunpowder, and throw it overboard. I had nothing to do, and I went. We wrapped it up in wet sails, but it was a ticklish piece of work, and took time. When we had got it overboard, the flames were gathering far and wide. I don't remember what I did until I heard Edward's voice speaking your name."

It was decided that the next morning they should set off homewards, striving on their way to obtain tidings of Edward. Frank would have given his only valuable (his mother's diamond-guard, which he wore constantly) as a pledge for some advance of money; but the kind Welsh people would not have it. They had not much spare cash, but what they had they readily lent to the survivors of the *Anna-Maria*. Dressed in the homely country garb of the people, Frank and Maggie set off in their car. It was a clear, frosty morning—the first that winter. The road soon lay high up on the cliffs along the coast. They looked down on the sea rocking below. At every village they stopped, and Frank inquired, and made the driver inquire in Welsh; but no tidings gained they of Edward; though here and there Maggie watched Frank into some cottage or other, going to see a dead body, beloved by some one; and when he came out, solemn and grave, their sad eyes met, and she knew it was not he they sought, without needing words.

At Abergele they stopped to rest; and because, being a larger place, it would need a longer search, Maggie lay down on the sofa, for she was very weak, and shut her eyes, and tried not to see for ever and ever that mad struggling crowd lighted by the red flames.

Frank came back in an hour or so; and soft behind him —laboriously treading on tiptoe—Mr. Buxton followed. He was evidently choking down his sobs; but when he saw the white, wan figure of Maggie he held out his arms.

"My dear! my daughter!" he said, "God bless you!" He could not speak more—he was fairly crying! but he put her hand in Frank's, and kept holding them both.

"My father," said Frank, speaking in a husky voice, while his eyes filled with tears, "had heard of it before he received my letter. I might have known that the lighthouse signals would take it fast to Liverpool. I had written a few lines to him saying I was going to you; happily they never reached—that was spared to my dear father."

Maggie saw the look of restored confidence that passed between father and son.

"My mother?" said she at last.

"She is here," said they both at once, with sad solemnity.

"Oh, where? Why did not you tell me?" exclaimed she, starting up. But their faces told her why.

"Edward is drowned—is dead," said she, reading their looks.

There was no answer.

"Let me go to my mother."

"Maggie, she is with him. His body was washed ashore last night. My father and she heard of it as they came along. Can you bear to see her? She will not leave him."

"Take me to her," Maggie answered.

They led her into a bed-room. Stretched on the bed lay Edward, but now so full of hope and worldly plans.

Mrs. Browne looked round and saw Maggie. She did not get up from her place by his head; nor did she long avert her gaze from his poor face. But she held Maggie's hand, as the girl knelt by her and spoke to her in a hushed voice, undisturbed by tears. Her miserable heart could not find that relief.

"He is dead!—he is gone!—he will never come back again! If he had gone to America—it might have been years first—but he would have come back to me. But now he will never come back again; never—never!"

Her voice died away, as the wailings of the night-wind die in the distance; and there was silence—silence more sad and hopeless than any passionate words of grief.

And to this day it is the same. She prizes her dead son more than a thousand living daughters, happy and prosperous as is Maggie now—rich in the love of many. If Maggie did not show such reverence to her mother's faithful sorrows, others might wonder at her refusal to be comforted by that sweet daughter. But Maggie treats her with such

tender sympathy, never thinking of herself or her own claims, that Frank, Erminia, Mr. Buxton, Nancy, and all, are reverent and sympathising too.

Over both old and young the memory of one who is dead broods like a dove—of one who could *do* but little during her lifetime; who was doomed only to "stand and wait;" who was meekly content to *be* gentle, holy, patient, and undefiled —the memory of the invalid Mrs. Buxton.

THE HEART OF JOHN MIDDLETON

I was born at Sawley, where the shadow of Pendle Hill falls at sunrise. I suppose Sawley sprang up into a village in the time of the monks, who had an abbey there. Many of the cottages are strange old places; others, again, are built of the abbey stones, mixed up with the shale from the neighbouring quarries; and you may see many a quaint bit of carving worked into the walls, or forming the lintels of the doors. There is a row of houses, built still more recently, where one Mr. Peel came to live for the sake of the water-power, and gave the place a fillip into something like life—though a different kind of life, as I take it, from the grand, slow ways folks had when the monks were about.

Now it was—six o'clock, ring the bell, throng to the factory; sharp home at twelve; and even at night, when work was done, we hardly knew how to walk slowly, we had been so bustled all day long. I can't recollect the time when I did not go to the factory. My father used to drag me there when I was quite a little fellow, in order to wind reels for him. I never remember my mother. I should have been a better man than I have been, if I had only had a notion of the sound of her voice, or the look on her face.

My father and I lodged in the house of a man who also worked in the factory. We were sadly thronged in Sawley, so many people came from different parts of the country to earn a livelihood at the new work; and it was some time before the row of cottages I have spoken of could be built. While they were building, my father was turned out of his

lodgings for drinking and being disorderly, and he and I slept in the brick-kiln; that is to say, when we did sleep o' nights; but, often and often, we went poaching; and many a hare and pheasant have I rolled up in clay, and roasted in the embers of the kiln. Then, as followed to reason, I was drowsy next day over my work; but father had no mercy on me for sleeping, for all he knew the cause of it, but kicked me where I lay, a heavy lump on the factory floor, and cursed and swore at me till I got up for very fear, and to my winding again. But, when his back was turned, I paid him off with heavier curses than he had given me, and longed to be a man, that I might be revenged on him. The words I then spoke I would not now dare to repeat; and, worse than hating words, a hating heart went with them. I forget the time when I did not know how to hate. When I first came to read, and learnt about Ishmael, I thought I must be of his doomed race, for my hand was against every man, and every man's against me. But I was seventeen or more before I cared for my book enough to learn to read.

After the row of cottages was finished, father took one, and set up for himself, in letting lodgings. I can't say much for the furnishing; but there was plenty of straw, and we kept up good fires; and there is a set of people who value warmth above everything. The worst lot about the place lodged with us. We used to have a supper in the middle of the night; there was game enough, or, if there was not game, there was poultry to be had for the stealing. By day, we all made a show of working in the factory. By night, we feasted and drank.

Now this web of my life was black enough, and coarse enough; but by-and-by, a little golden, filmy thread began to be woven in—the dawn of God's mercy was at hand.

One blowy October morning, as I sauntered lazily along to the mill, I came to the little wooden bridge over a brook that falls into the Bribble. On the plank there stood a child, balancing the pitcher on her head, with which she had been to fetch water. She was so light on her feet that, had it not

been for the weight of the pitcher, I almost believe the wind would have taken her up, and wafted her away as it carries off a blow-ball in seed-time; her blue cotton dress was blown before her, as if she were spreading her wings for a flight; she turned her face round, as if to ask me for something, but when she saw who it was, she hesitated, for I had a bad name in the village, and I doubt not she had been warned against me. But her heart was too innocent to be distrustful; so she said to me, timidly—

"Please, John Middleton, will you carry me this heavy jug just over the bridge?"

It was the very first time I had ever been spoken to gently. I was ordered here and there by my father and his rough companions; I was abused and cursed by them if I failed in doing what they wished; if I succeeded, there came no expression of thanks or gratitude. I was informed of facts necessary for me to know. But the gentle words of request or entreaty were aforetime unknown to me, and now their tones fell on my ear soft and sweet as a distant peal of bells. I wished that I knew how to speak properly in reply; but though we were of the same standing as regarded worldly circumstances, there was some mighty difference between us, which made me unable to speak in her language of soft words and modest entreaty. There was nothing for me but to take up the pitcher in a kind of gruff, shy silence, and carry it over the bridge, as she had asked me. When I gave it her back again, she thanked me and tripped away, leaving me, wordless, gazing after her like an awkward lout as I was. I knew well enough who she was. She was grandchild to Eleanor Hadfield, an aged woman, who was reputed as a witch by my father and his set, for no other reason, that I can make out, than her scorn, dignity, and fearlessness of rancour. It was true we often met her in the grey dawn of the morning, when we returned from poaching, and my father used to curse her, under his breath, for a witch, such as were burnt long ago on Pendle Hill top; but I had heard that Eleanor was a skilful sick nurse, and ever ready to give

her services to those who were ill; and I believe that she had been sitting up through the night (the night that we had been spending under the wild heavens, in deeds as wild) with those who were appointed to die. Nelly was her orphan granddaughter—her little handmaiden, her treasure, her one ewe lamb. Many and many a day have I watched by the brook-side, hoping that some happy gust of wind, coming with opportune bluster down the hollow of the dale, might make me necessary once more to her. I longed to hear her speak to me again. I said the words she had used to myself, trying to catch her tone; but the chance never came again. I do not know that she ever knew how I watched for her there. I found out that she went to school, and nothing would serve me but that I must go too. My father scoffed at me; I did not care. I knew nought of what reading was, nor that it was likely that I should be laughed at: I, a great hulking lad of seventeen or upwards, for going to learn my A, B, C, in the midst of a crowd of little ones. I stood just this way in my mind. Nelly was at school; it was the best place for seeing her, and hearing her voice again. Therefore I would go too. My father talked, and swore, and threatened, but I stood to it. He said I should leave school, weary of it in a month. I swore a deeper oath than I like to remember, that I would stay a year, and come out a reader and a writer. My father hated the notion of folks learning to read, and said it took all the spirit out of them; besides, he thought he had a right to every penny of my wages, and though, when he was in good humour, he might have given me many a jug of ale, he grudged my twopence a week for schooling. However, to school I went. It was a different place to what I had thought it before I went inside. The girls sat on one side, and the boys on the other; so I was not near Nelly. She, too, was in the first class; I was put with the little toddling things that could hardly run alone. The master sat in the middle, and kept pretty strict watch over us. But I could see Nelly, and hear her read her chapter; and even when it was one with a long list of hard names, such as the

master was very fond of giving her, to show how well she could hit them off without spelling, I thought I had never heard a prettier music. Now and then she read other things. I did not know what they were, true or false; but I listened because she read; and, by-and-by, I began to wonder. I remember the first word I ever spoke to her was to ask her (as we were coming out of school) who was the Father of whom she had been reading, for when she said the words "Our Father," her voice dropped into a soft, holy kind of low sound, which struck me more than any loud reading, it seemed so loving and tender. When I asked her this, she looked at me with her great blue wondering eyes, at first shocked; and then, as it were, melted down into pity and sorrow, she said in the same way, below her breath, in which she read the words, "Our Father,"—

"Don't you know? It is God."

"God?"

"Yes; the God that grandmother tells me about."

"Tell me what she says, will you?" So we sat down on the hedge-bank, she a little above me, while I looked up into her face, and she told me all the holy texts her grandmother had taught her, as explaining all that could be explained of the Almighty. I listened in silence, for indeed I was overwhelmed with astonishment. Her knowledge was principally rote-knowledge; she was too young for much more; but we, in Lancashire, speak a rough kind of Bible language, and the texts seemed very clear to me. I rose up, dazed and overpowered. I was going away in silence, when I bethought me of my manners, and turned back, and said "Thank you," for the first time I ever remember saying it in my life. That was a great day for me, in more ways than one.

I was always one who could keep very steady to an object when once I had set it before me. My object was to know Nelly. I was conscious of nothing more. But it made me regardless of all other things. The master might scold, the little ones might laugh; I bore it all without giving it a second

thought. I kept to my year, and came out a reader and writer; more, however, to stand well in Nelly's good opinion, than because of my oath. About this time, my father committed some bad, cruel deed, and had to fly the country. I was glad he went; for I had never loved or cared for him, and wanted to shake myself clear of his set. But it was no easy matter. Honest folk stood aloof; only bad men held out their arms to me with a welcome. Even Nelly seemed to have a mixture of fear now with her kind ways towards me. I was the son of John Middleton, who, if he were caught, would be hung at Lancaster Castle. I thought she looked at me sometimes with a sort of sorrowful horror. Others were not forbearing enough to keep their expression of feeling confined to looks. The son of the overlooker at the mill never ceased twitting me with my father's crime; he now brought up his poaching against him, though I knew very well how many a good supper he himself had made on game which had been given him to make him and his father wink at late hours in the morning. And how were such as my father to come honestly by game?

This lad, Dick Jackson, was the bane of my life. He was a year or two older than I was, and had much power over the men who worked at the mill, as he could report to his father what he chose. I could not always hold my peace when he "threaped" me with my father's sins, but gave it him back sometimes in a storm of passion. It did me no good; only threw me farther from the company of better men, who looked aghast and shocked at the oaths I poured out—blasphemous words learnt in my childhood, which I could not forget now that I would fain have purified myself of them; while all the time Dick Jackson stood by, with a mocking smile of intelligence; and when I had ended, breathless and weary with spent passion, he would turn to those whose respect I longed to earn, and ask if I were not a worthy son of my father, and likely to tread in his steps. But this smiling indifference of his to my miserable vehemence was not all, though it was the worst part of his conduct,

for it made the rankling hatred grow up in my heart, and overshadow it like the great gourd-tree of the prophet Jonah. But his was a merciful shade, keeping out the burning sun; mine blighted what it fell upon.

What Dick Jackson did besides, was this. His father was a skilful overlooker, and a good man. Mr. Peel valued him so much, that he was kept on, although his health was failing; and when he was unable, through illness, to come to the mill, he deputed his son to watch over, and report the men. It was too much power for one so young—I speak it calmly now. Whatever Dick Jackson became, he had strong temptations when he was young, which will be allowed for hereafter. But at the time of which I am telling, my hate raged like a fire. I believed that he was the one sole obstacle to my being received as fit to mix with good and honest men. I was sick of crime and disorder, and would fain have come over to a different kind of life and have been industrious, sober, honest, and right spoken (I had no idea of higher virtue then), and at every turn Dick Jackson met me with his sneers. I have walked the night through, in the old abbey field, planning how I could outwit him, and win men's respect in spite of him. The first time I ever prayed was underneath the silent stars, kneeling by the old abbey walls, throwing up my arms, and asking God for the power of revenge upon him.

I had heard that if I prayed earnestly, God would give me what I asked for, and I looked upon it as a kind of chance for the fulfilment of my wishes. If earnestness would have won the boon for me, never were wicked words so earnestly spoken. And oh, later on, my prayer was heard, and my wish granted! All this time I saw little of Nelly. Her grandmother was failing, and she had much to do indoors. Besides, I believed I had read her looks aright, when I took them to speak of aversion; and I planned to hide myself from her sight, as it were, until I could stand upright before men, with fearless eyes, dreading no face of accusation. It was possible to acquire a good character; I would do it—I

did it: but no one brought up among respectable untempted people can tell the unspeakable hardness of the task. In the evenings I would not go forth among the village throng; for the acquaintances that claimed me were my father's old associates, who would have been glad enough to enlist a strong young man like me in their projects; and the men who would have shunned me, and kept aloof, were the steady and orderly. So I stayed indoors, and practised myself in reading. You will say I should have found it easier to earn a good character away from Sawley, at some place where neither I nor my father was known. So I should; but it would not have been the same thing to my mind. Besides, representing all good men, all goodness to me, in Sawley Nelly lived. In her sight I would work out my life, and fight my way upwards to men's respect. Two years passed on. Every day I strove fiercely; every day my struggles were made fruitless by the son of the overlooker; and I seemed but where I was—but where I must ever be esteemed by all who knew me—but as the son of the criminal—wild, reckless, ripe for crime myself. Where was the use of my reading and writing? These acquirements were disregarded and scouted by those among whom I was thrust back to take my portion. I could have read any chapter in the Bible now; and Nelly seemed as though she would never know it. I was driven in upon my books; and few enough of them I had. The pedlars brought them round in their packs, and I bought what I could. I had the "Seven Champions," and the "Pilgrim's Progress;" and both seemed to me equally wonderful, and equally founded on fact. I got Byron's "Narrative," and Milton's "Paradise Lost;" but I lacked the knowledge which would give a clue to all. Still they afforded me pleasure, because they took me out of myself, and made me forget my miserable position, and made me unconscious (for the time at least) of my one great passion of hatred against Dick Jackson.

When Nelly was about seventeen her grandmother died. I stood aloof in the churchyard, behind the great yew-tree,

and watched the funeral. It was the first religious service that ever I heard; and to my shame, as I thought, it affected me to tears. The words seemed so peaceful and holy that I longed to go to church, but I durst not, because I had never been. The parish church was at Bolton, far enough away to serve as an excuse for all who did not care to go. I heard Nelly's sobs, filling up every pause in the clergyman's voice; and every sob of hers went to my heart. She passed me on her way out of the churchyard; she was so near I might have touched her; but her head was hanging down, and I durst not speak to her. Then the question arose, what was to become of her? She must earn her living; was it to be as a farm-servant or by working at the mill? I knew enough of both kinds of life to make me tremble for her. My wages were such as to enable me to marry, if I chose; and I never thought of woman, for my wife, but Nelly. Still, I would not have married her now, if I could; for, as yet, I had not risen up to the character which I determined it was fit that Nelly's husband should have. When I was rich in good report, I would come forward and take my chance, but until then I would hold my peace. I had faith in the power of my long-continued dogged breasting of opinion. Sooner or later it must, it should, yield, and I be received among the ranks of good men. But, meanwhile, what was to become of Nelly? I reckoned up my wages; I went to inquire what the board of a girl would be who should help her in her household work, and live with her as a daughter, at the house of one of the most decent women of the place; she looked at me suspiciously. I kept down my temper, and told her I would never come near the place; that I would keep away from that end of the village, and that the girl for whom I made the inquiry should never know but what the parish paid for her keep. It would not do; she suspected me; but I know I had power over myself to have kept my word; and besides, I would not for worlds have had Nelly put under any obligation to me, which should speck the purity of her love, or dim it by a mixture of

gratitude—the love that I craved to earn, not for my money, not for my kindness, but for myself. I heard that Nelly had met with a place in Bolland; and I could see no reason why I might not speak to her once before she left our neighbourhood. I meant it to be a quiet friendly telling her of my sympathy in her sorrow. I felt I could command myself. So, on the Sunday before she was to leave Sawley, I waited near the wood-path by which I knew that she would return from afternoon church. The birds made such a melodious warble, such a busy sound among the leaves, that I did not hear approaching footsteps till they were close at hand, and then there were sounds of two persons' voices. The wood was near that part of Sawley where Nelly was staying with friends; the path through it led to their house, and theirs only, so I knew it must be she, for I had watched her setting out to church alone.

But who was the other?

The blood went to my heart and head, as if I were shot, when I saw that it was Dick Jackson. Was this the end of it all? In the steps of sin which my father had trod, I would rush to my death and my doom. Even where I stood I longed for a weapon to slay him. How dared he come near my Nelly? She too—I thought her faithless, and forgot how little I had ever been to her in outward action; how few words, and those how uncouth, I had ever spoken to her; and I hated her for a traitress. These feelings passed through me before I could see, my eyes and head were so dizzy and blind. When I looked I saw Dick Jackson holding her hand, and speaking quick and low and thick, as a man speaks in great vehemence. She seemed white and dismayed; but all at once, at some word of his (and what it was she never would tell me), she looked as though she defied a fiend, and wrenched herself out of his grasp. He caught hold of her again, and began once more the thick whisper that I loathed. I could bear it no longer, nor did I see why I should. I stepped out from behind the tree where I had been lying. When she saw me, she lost her look of one

strung up to desperation, and came and clung to me; and I felt like a giant in strength and might. I held her with one arm, but I did not take my eyes off him; I felt as if they blazed down into his soul and scorched him up. He never spoke, but tried to look as though he defied me. At last, his eyes fell before mine; I dared not speak, for the old horrid oaths thronged up to my mouth, and I dreaded giving them way, and terrifying my poor, trembling Nelly.

At last, he made to go past me: I drew her out of the pathway. By instinct she wrapped her garments round her, as if to avoid his accidental touch; and he was stung by this, I suppose—I believe—to the mad, miserable revenge he took. As my back was turned to him, in an endeavour to speak some words to Nelly that might soothe her into calmness, she, who was looking after him, like one fascinated with terror, saw him take a sharp, shaley stone, and aim it at me. Poor darling! she clung round me as a shield, making her sweet body into a defence for mine. It hit her, and she spoke no word, kept back her cry of pain, but fell at my feet in a swoon. He—the coward! ran off as soon as he saw what he had done. I was with Nelly alone in the green gloom of the wood. The quivering and leaf-tinted light made her look as if she were dead. I carried her, not knowing if I bore a corpse or not, to her friend's house. I did not stay to explain, but ran madly for the doctor.

Well! I cannot bear to recur to that time again. Five weeks I lived in the agony of suspense; from which my only relief was in laying savage plans for revenge. If I hated him before, what think ye I did now? It seemed as if earth could not hold us twain, but that one of us must go down to Gehenna. I could have killed him; and would have done it without a scruple, but that seemed too poor and bold a revenge. At length—oh, the weary waiting!—oh, the sickening of my heart!—Nelly grew better; as well as she was ever to grow. The bright colour had left her cheek; the mouth quivered with repressed pain; the eyes

were dim with tears that agony had forced into them; and I loved her a thousand times better and more than when she was bright and blooming! What was best of all, I began to perceive that she cared for me. I know her grandmother's friends warned her against me, and told her I came of a bad stock; but she had passed the point where remonstrance from bystanders can take effect—she loved me as I was, a strange mixture of bad and good, all unworthy of her. We spoke together now, as those do whose lives are bound up in each other. I told her I would marry her as soon as she had recovered her health. Her friends shook their heads; but they saw that she would be unfit for farm-service or heavy work, and they perhaps thought, as many a one does, that a bad husband was better than none at all. Anyhow, we were married; and I learnt to bless God for my happiness so far beyond my deserts. I kept her like a lady. I was a skilful workman, and earned good wages; and every want she had I tried to gratify. Her wishes were few and simple enough, poor Nelly! If they had been ever so fanciful, I should have had my reward in the new feeling of the holiness of home. She could lead me as a little child with the charm of her gentle voice, and her ever-kind words. She would plead for all when I was full of anger and passion; only Dick Jackson's name passed never between our lips during all that time. In the evening she lay back in her beehive chair, and read to me. I think I see her now, pale and weak, with her sweet young face lighted by her holy, earnest eyes, telling me of the Saviour's life and death, till they were filled with tears. I longed to have been there, to have avenged Him on the wicked Jews. I liked Peter the best of all the disciples. But I got the Bible myself, and read the mighty act of God's vengeance, in the old Testament, with a kind of triumphant faith that, sooner or later, He would take my cause in hand, and revenge me on mine enemy.

In a year or so, Nelly had a baby—a little girl with eyes just like hers, that looked, with grave openness, right into

yours. Nelly recovered but slowly. It was just before winter, the cotton-crop had failed, and master had to turn off many hands. I thought I was sure of being kept on, for I had earned a steady character, and did my work well; but once again it was permitted that Dick Jackson should do me wrong. He induced his father to dismiss me among the first in my branch of the business; and there was I, just before winter set in, with a wife and new-born child, and a small enough store of money to keep body and soul together till I could get to work again. All my savings had gone by Christmas Eve, and we sat in the house foodless for the morrow's festival. Nelly looked pinched and worn; the baby cried for a larger supply of milk than its poor starving mother could give it. My right hand had not forgot its cunning, and I went out once more to my poaching. I knew where the gang met; and I knew what a welcome back I should have—a far warmer and more hearty welcome than good men had given me when I tried to enter their ranks. On the road to the meeting-place I fell in with an old man, one who had been a companion to my father in his early days.

"What, lad!" said he, "art thou turning back to the old trade? It's the better business, now that cotton has failed."

"Ay," said I, "cotton is starving us outright. A man may bear a deal himself, but he'll do aught bad and sinful to save his wife and child."

"Nay, lad," said he, "poaching is not sinful; it goes against man's laws, but not against God's."

I was too weak to argue or talk much. I had not tasted food for two days. But I murmured, "At any rate, I trusted to have been clear of it for the rest of my days. It led my father wrong at first. I have tried and I have striven. Now I give all up. Right or wrong shall be the same to me. Some are fore-doomed; and so am I." And, as I spoke, some notion of the futurity that would separate Nelly, the pure and holy, from me, the reckless and desperate one,

came over me with an irrepressible burst of anguish. Just then the bells of Bolton-in-Bolland struck up a glad peal, which came over the woods, in the solemn midnight air, like the sons of the morning shouting for joy—they seemed so clear and jubilant. It was Christmas Day: and I felt like an outcast from the gladness and the salvation. Old Jonah spoke out:

"Yon's the Christmas bells. I say, Johnny, my lad, I've no notion of taking such a spiritless chap as thou into the thick of it, with thy rights and thy wrongs. We don't trouble ourselves with such fine lawyer's stuff, and we bring down the 'varmint' all the better. Now, I'll not have thee in our gang, for thou art not up to the fun, and thou'd hang fire when the time came to be doing. But I've a shrewd guess that plaguey wife and child of thine are at the bottom of thy half-and-half joining. Now, I was thy father's friend afore he took to them helter-skelter ways, and I've five shillings and a neck of mutton at thy service. I'll not list a fasting man; but if thou'lt come to us with a full stomach, and say, 'I like your life, my lads, and I'll make one of you with pleasure, the first shiny night, why, we'll give you a welcome and a half; but, to-night, make no more ado, but turn back with me for the mutton and the money."

I was not proud: nay, I was most thankful. I took the meat, and boiled some broth for my poor Nelly. She was in a sleep, or in a faint, I know not which; but I roused her, and held her up in bed, and fed her with a teaspoon, and the light came back to her eyes, and the faint moonlight smile to her lips; and when she had ended, she said her innocent grace, and fell asleep, with her baby on her breast. I sat over the fire, and listened to the bells, as they swept past my cottage on the gusts of the wind. I longed and yearned for the second coming of Christ, of which Nelly had told me. The world seemed cruel, and hard, and strong—too strong for me; and I prayed to cling to the hem of His garment, and be borne over the rough places when I fainted and bled, and found no man to pity or help me but poor old

Jonah, the publican and sinner. All this time my own woes and my own self were uppermost in my mind, as they are in the minds of most who have been hardly used. As I thought of my wrongs, and my sufferings, my heart burned against Dick Jackson; and as the bells rose and fell, so my hopes waxed and waned, that in those mysterious days, of which they were both the remembrance and the prophecy, he would be purged from off the earth. I took Nelly's Bible, and turned, not to the gracious story of the Saviour's birth, but to the records of the former days, when the Jews took such wild revenge upon all their opponents. I was a Jew—a leader among the people. Dick Jackson was as Pharaoh, as the King Agag, who walked delicately, thinking the bitterness of death was past—in short, he was the conquered enemy, over whom I gloated, with my Bible in my hand—that Bible which contained our Saviour's words on the Cross. As yet, those words seemed faint and meaningless to me, like a tract of country seen in the starlight haze; while the histories of the Old Testament were grand and distinct in the blood-red colour of sunset. By-and-by that night passed into day, and little piping voices came round carol-singing. They wakened Nelly. I went to her as soon as I heard her stirring.

"Nelly," said I, "there's money and food in the house; I will be off to Padiham seeking work, while thou hast something to go upon."

"Not to-day," said she; "stay to-day with me. If thou wouldst only go to church with me this once"—for you see I had never been inside a church but when we were married, and she was often praying me to go; and now she looked at me, with a sigh just creeping forth from her lips, as she expected a refusal. But I did not refuse. I had been kept away from church before because I dared not go; and now I was desperate, and dared do anything. If I did look like a heathen in the face of all men, why, I was a heathen in my heart, for I was falling back into all my evil ways. I had resolved, if my search of work at Padiham should fail, I

would follow my father's footsteps, and take with my own right hand and by my strength of arm what it was denied me to obtain honestly. I had resolved to leave Sawley, where a curse seemed to hang over me: so what did it matter if I went to church, all unbeknowing what strange ceremonies were there performed? I walked thither as a sinful man—sinful in my heart. Nelly hung on my arm, but even she could not get me to speak. I went in; she found my places, and pointed to the words, and looked up into my eyes with hers, so full of faith and joy. But I saw nothing but Richard Jackson—I heard nothing but his loud nasal voice, making response, and desecrating all the holy words. He was in broadcloth of the best—I in my fustian jacket. He was prosperous and glad—I was starving and desperate. Nelly grew pale, as she saw the expression in my eyes; and she prayed ever and ever more fervently as the thought of me tempted by the Devil even at that very moment came more fully before her.

By-and-by she forgot even me, and laid her soul bare before God, in a long, silent, weeping prayer, before we left the church. Nearly all had gone; and I stood by her, unwilling to disturb her, unable to join her. At last she rose up, heavenly calm. She took my arm, and we went home through the woods, where all the birds seemed tame and familiar. Nelly said she thought all living creatures knew it was Christmas Day, and rejoiced, and were loving together. I believe it was the frost that had tamed them; and I felt the hatred that was in me, and knew that, whatever else was loving, I was full of malice and uncharitableness; nor did I wish to be otherwise. That afternoon I bade Nelly and our child farewell, and tramped to Padiham. I got work—how I hardly know; for stronger and stronger came the force of the temptation to lead a wild, free life of sin; legions seemed whispering evil thoughts to me, and only my gentle, pleading Nelly to pull me back from the great gulf. However, as I said before, I got work, and set off homewards to move my wife and child to that neighbourhood. I hated

Sawley, and yet I was fiercely indignant to leave it, with my purposes unaccomplished. I was still an outcast from the more respectable, who stood afar off from such as I; and mine enemy lived and flourished in their regard. Padiham, however, was not so far away for me to despair—to relinquish my fixed determination. It was on the eastern side of the great Pendle Hill, ten miles away, maybe. Hate will overleap a greater obstacle. I took a cottage on the Fell, high up on the side of the hill. We saw a long black moorland slope before us, and then the grey stone houses of Padiham, over which a black cloud hung, different from the blue wood or turf smoke about Sawley. The wild winds came down and whistled round our house many a day when all was still below. But I was happy then. I rose in men's esteem. I had work in plenty. Our child lived and throve. But I forgot not our country proverb—"Keep a stone in thy pocket for seven years; turn it, and keep it seven years more; but have it ever ready to cast to thine enemy when the time comes."

One day a fellow-workman asked me to go to a hill-side preaching. Now, I never cared to go to church; but there was something newer and freer in the notion of praying to God right under His great dome; and the open air had had a charm to me ever since my wild boyhood. Besides, they said, these ranters had strange ways with them, and I thought it would be fun to see their way of setting about it; and this ranter of all others had made himself a name in our parts. Accordingly we went; it was a fine summer's evening, after work was done. When we got to the place we saw such a crowd as I never saw before—men, women, and children; all ages were gathered together, and sat on the hill-side. They were careworn, diseased, sorrowful, criminal; all that was told on their faces, which were hard and strongly marked. In the midst, standing in a cart, was the ranter. When I first saw him, I said to my companion, "Lord! what a little man to make all this pother! I could trip him up with one of my fingers;" and then I sat down,

and looked about me a bit. All eyes were fixed on the preacher; and I turned mine upon him too. He began to speak; it was in no fine-drawn language, but in words such as we heard every day of our lives, and about things we did every day of our lives. He did not call our shortcomings pride or worldliness, or pleasure-seeking, which would have given us no clear notion of what he meant; but he just told us outright what we did, and then he gave it a name, and said that it was accursed, and that we were lost if we went on so doing.

By this time the tears and sweat were running down his face; he was wrestling for our souls. We wondered how he knew our innermost lives as he did, for each one of us saw his sin set before him in plain-spoken words. Then he cried out to us to repent; and spoke first to us, and then to God, in a way that would have shocked many—but it did not shock me. I liked strong things, and I liked the bare, full truth; and I felt brought nearer to God in that hour—the summer darkness creeping over us, and one after one the stars coming out above us, like the eyes of the angels watching us—than I had ever done in my life before. When he had brought us to our tears and sighs, he stopped his loud voice of upbraiding, and there was a hush, only broken by sobs and quivering moans, in which I heard through the gloom the voices of strong men in anguish and supplication, as well as the shriller tones of women. Suddenly he was heard again; by this time we could not see him; but his voice was now tender as the voice of an angel, and he told us of Christ, and implored us to come to Him. I never heard such passionate entreaty. He spoke as if he saw Satan hovering near us in the dark, dense night, and as if our only safety lay in a very present coming to the Cross; I believe he did see Satan: we know he haunts the desolate old hills, awaiting his time, and now or never it was with many a soul. At length there was a sudden silence; and, by the cries of those nearest to the preacher, we heard that he had fainted. We had all crowded round him, as if he were

our safety and our guide; and he was overcome by the heat and the fatigue, for we were the fifth set of people whom he had addressed that day. I left the crowd who were leading him down, and took a lonely path myself.

Here was the earnestness I needed. To this weak and weary fainting man, religion was a life and a passion. I look back now, and wonder at my blindness as to what was the root of all my Nelly's patience and long-suffering; for I thought now I had found out what religion was, and that hitherto it had been all an unknown thing to me.

Henceforward, my life was changed. I was zealous and fanatical. Beyond the set to whom I had affiliated myself, I had no sympathy. I would have persecuted all who differed from me, if I had only had the power. I became an ascetic in all bodily enjoyments. And, strange and inexplicable mystery, I had some thoughts that by every act of self-denial I was attaining to my unholy end, and that, when I had fasted and prayed long enough, God would place my vengeance in my hands. I have knelt by Nelly's bedside, and vowed to live a self-denying life, as regarded all outward things, if so that God would grant my prayer. I left it in His hands. I felt sure He would trace out the token and the word; and Nelly would listen to my passionate words, and lie awake sorrowful and heart-sore through the night; and I would get up and make her tea, and rearrange her pillows, with a strange and wilful blindness that my bitter words and blasphemous prayers had cost her miserable, sleepless nights. My Nelly was suffering yet from that blow. How or where the stone had hurt her, I never understood; but in consequence of that one moment's action, her limbs became numb and dead, and, by slow degrees, she took to her bed, from whence she was never carried alive. There she lay, propped up by pillows, her meek face ever bright, and smiling forth a greeting; her white, pale hands ever busy with some kind of work; and our little Grace was as the power of motion to her. Fierce as I was away from her, I never could speak to her but in my gentlest tones.

She seemed to me as if she had never wrestled for salvation as I had; and, when away from her, I resolved many a time and oft, that I would rouse her up to her state of danger when I returned home that evening—even if strong reproach were required I would rouse her up to her soul's need. But I came in and heard her voice singing some holy word of patience, some psalm which, maybe, had comforted the martyrs; and when I saw her face like the face of an angel, full of patience and happy faith, I put off my awakening speeches till another time.

One night, long ago, when I was yet young and strong, although my years were past forty, I sat alone in my house-place. Nelly was always in bed, as I have told you, and Grace lay in a cot by her side. I believed them to be both asleep; though how they could sleep I could not conceive, so wild and terrible was the night. The wind came sweeping down from the hill-top in great beats, like the pulses of heaven; and, during the pauses, while I listened for the coming roar, I felt the earth shiver beneath me. The rain beat against windows and doors, and sobbed for entrance. I thought the Prince of the Air was abroad; and I heard, or fancied I heard, shrieks come on the blast, like the cries of sinful souls given over to his power.

The sounds came nearer and nearer. I got up and saw to the fastenings of the door, for, though I cared not for mortal man, I did care for what I believed was surrounding the house, in evil might and power. But the door shook as though it, too, were in deadly terror, and I thought the fastenings would give way. I stood facing the entrance, lashing my heart up to defy the spiritual enemy that I looked to see, every instant, in bodily presence; and the door did burst open, and before me stood—what was it? man or demon? a grey-haired man, with poor, worn clothes all wringing wet, and he himself battered and piteous to look upon, from the storm he had passed through.

"Let me in!" he said. "Give me shelter. I am poor, or I would reward you. And I am friendless, too," he said,

looking up in my face, like one seeking what he cannot find. In that look, strangely changed, I knew that God had heard me; for it was the old cowardly look of my life's enemy. Had he been a stranger, I might not have welcomed him; but as he was mine enemy, I gave him welcome in a lordly dish. I sat opposite to him. "Whence do you come?" said I. "It is a strange night to be out on the fells."

He looked up at me sharp; but in general he held his head down like a beast or hound.

"You won't betray me. I'll not trouble you long. As soon as the storm abates, I'll go."

"Friend," said I, "what have I to betray?" and I trembled lest he should keep himself out of my power and not tell me. "You come for shelter, and I give you of my best. Why do you suspect me?"

"Because," said he, in his abject bitterness, "all the world is against me. I never met with goodness or kindness; and now I am hunted like a wild beast. I'll tell you —I'm a convict returned before my time. I was a Sawley man," (as if I, of all men, did not know it!) "and I went back, like a fool, to the old place. They've hunted me out where I would fain have lived rightly and quietly, and they'll send me back to that hell upon earth, if they catch me. I did not know it would be such a night. Only let me rest and get warm once more, and I'll go away. Good, kind man, have pity upon me!" I smiled all his doubts away; I promised him a bed on the floor, and I thought of Jael and Sisera. My heart leaped up like a war-horse at the sound of the trumpet, and said, "Ha, ha, the Lord hath heard my prayer and supplication; I shall have vengeance at last!"

He did not dream who I was. He was changed; so that I, who had learned his features with all the diligence of hatred, did not, at first, recognise him; and he thought not of me, only of his own woe and affright. He looked into the fire with the dreamy gaze of one whose strength of character, if he had any, is beaten out of him, and cannot return at any emergency whatsoever. He sighed and pitied himself, yet

could not decide on what to do. I went softly about my business, which was to make him up a bed on the floor, and, when he was lulled to sleep and security, to make the best of my way to Padiham, and summon the constable, into whose hands I would give him up, to be taken back to his "hell upon earth." I went into Nelly's room. She was awake and anxious. I saw she had been listening to the voices.

"Who is there?" said she. "John, tell me; it sounded like a voice I knew. For God's sake, speak!"

I smiled a quiet smile. "It is a poor man, who has lost his way. Go to sleep, my dear—I shall make him up on the floor. I may not come for some time. Go to sleep;" and I kissed her. I thought she was soothed, but not fully satisfied. However, I hastened away before there was any further time for questioning. I made up the bed, and Richard Jackson, tired out, lay down and fell asleep. My contempt for him almost equalled my hate. If I were avoiding return to a place which I thought to be a hell upon earth, think you I would have taken a quiet sleep under any man's roof till, somehow or another, I was secure. Now comes this man, and, with incontinence of tongue, blabs out the very thing he most should conceal, and then lies down to a good, quiet, snoring sleep. I looked again. His face was old, and worn, and miserable. So should mine enemy look. And yet it was sad to gaze upon him, poor, hunted creature!

I would gaze no more, lest I grew weak and pitiful. Thus I took my hat, and softly opened the door. The wind blew in, but did not disturb him, he was so utterly weary. I was out in the open air of night. The storm was ceasing, and, instead of the black sky of doom that I had seen when I last looked forth, the moon was come out, wan and pale, as if wearied with the fight in the heavens, and her white light fell ghostly and calm on many a well-known object. Now and then, a dark, torn cloud was blown across her home in the sky; but they grew fewer and fewer, and at last she shone out steady and clear. I could see Padiham

down before me. I heard the noise of the watercourses down the hill-side. My mind was full of one thought, and strained upon that one thought, and yet my senses were most acute and observant. When I came to the brook, it was swollen to a rapid, tossing river; and the little bridge, with its handrail, was utterly swept away. It was like the bridge at Sawley, where I had first seen Nelly; and I remembered that day even then in the midst of my vexation at having to go round. I turned away from the brook, and there stood a little figure facing me. No spirit from the dead could have affrighted me as it did; for I saw it was Grace, whom I had left in bed by her mother's side.

She came to me, and took my hand. Her bare feet glittered white in the moonshine, and sprinkled the light upwards, as they plashed through the pool.

"Father," said she, "mother bade me say this." Then, pausing to gather breath and memory, she repeated these words like a lesson of which she feared to forget a syllable—

"Mother says, 'There is a God in heaven; and in His house are many mansions. If you hope to meet her there, you will come back and speak to her; if you are to be separate for ever and ever, you will go on, and may God have mercy on her and on you!' Father, I have said it right—every word."

I was silent. At last, I said—

"What made mother say this? How came she to send you out?"

"I was asleep, father, and I heard her cry. I wakened up, and I think you had but just left the house, and that she was calling for you. Then she prayed, with the tears rolling down her cheeks, and kept saying—'Oh, that I could walk!—oh, that for one hour I could run and walk!' So I said, 'Mother, I can run and walk. Where must I go?' And she clutched at my arm, and bade God bless me, and told me not to fear, for that He would compass me about, and taught me my message: and now, father, dear father, you will meet mother in heaven, won't you, and not be

separate for ever and ever?" She clung to my knees, and pleaded once more in her mother's words. I took her up in my arms, and turned homewards.

"Is yon man there, on the kitchen floor?" asked I.

"Yes!" she answered. At any rate, my vengeance was not out of my power yet.

When we got home I passed him, dead asleep.

In our room, to which my child guided me, was Nelly. She sat up in bed, a most unusual attitude for her, and one of which I thought she had been incapable of attaining to without help. She had her hands clasped, and her face rapt, as if in prayer; and when she saw me, she lay back with a sweet ineffable smile. She could not speak at first; but when I came near, she took my hand and kissed it; and then she called Grace to her, and made her take off her cloak and her wet things, and dressed her in her short scanty night-gown; she slipped in to her mother's warm side; and all this time my Nelly never told me why she summoned me: it seemed enough that she should hold my hand, and feel that I was there. I believe she had read my heart; and yet I durst not speak to ask her. At last, she looked up. "My husband," said she, "God has saved you and me from a great sorrow this night." I would not understand, and I felt her look die away into disappointment.

"That poor wanderer in the house-place is Richard Jackson, is it not?"

I made no answer. Her face grew white and wan.

"Oh," said she, "this is hard to bear. Speak what is in your mind, I beg of you. I will not thwart you harshly; dearest John, only speak to me."

"Why need I speak? You seem to know all."

"I do know that his is a voice I can never forget; and I do know the awful prayers you have prayed, and I know how I have lain awake, to pray that your words might never be heard; and I am a powerless cripple. I put my cause in God's hands. You shall not do the man any harm. What you have it in your thoughts to do, I cannot tell. But I

know that you cannot do it. My eyes are dim with a strange mist; but some voice tells me that you will forgive even Richard Jackson. Dear husband—dearest John, it is so dark, I cannot see you; but speak once to me."

I moved the candle; but when I saw her face, I saw what was drawing the mist over those loving eyes—how strange and woeful that she could die! Her little girl lying by her side looked in my face, and then at her; and the wild knowledge of death shot through her young heart, and she screamed aloud.

Nelly opened her eyes once more. They fell upon the gaunt, sorrow-worn man who was the cause of all. He roused him from his sleep, at that child's piercing cry, and stood at the doorway, looking in. He knew Nelly, and understood where the storm had driven him to shelter. He came towards her—

"Oh, woman—dying woman—you have haunted me in the loneliness of the Bush far away—you have been in my dreams for ever—the hunting of men has not been so terrible as the hunting of your spirit—that stone—that stone!" He fell down by her bedside in an agony; above which her saint-like face looked on us all, for the last time, glorious with the coming light of heaven. She spoke once again—

"It was a moment of passion; I never bore you malice for it. I forgive you; and so does John, I trust."

Could I keep my purpose there? It faded into nothing. But, above my choking tears, I strove to speak clear and distinct, for her dying ear to hear, and her sinking heart to be gladdened.

"I forgive you, Richard! I will befriend you in your trouble."

She could not see; but, instead of the dim shadow of death stealing over her face, a quiet light came over it, which we knew was the look of a soul at rest.

That night I listened to his tale for her sake; and I learned that it is better to be sinned against than to sin. In the storm of the night mine enemy came to me; in the calm

of the grey morning I led him forth, and bade him "God speed." And a woe had come upon me, but the burning burden of a sinful, angry heart was taken off. I am old now, and my daughter is married. I try to go about preaching and teaching in my rough, rude way; and what I teach is, how Christ lived and died, and what was Nelly's faith of love.

DISAPPEARANCES

I AM not in the habit of seeing the *Household Words* regularly; but a friend, who lately sent me some of the back numbers, recommended me to read "all the papers relating to the Detective and Protective Police," which I accordingly did—not as the generality of readers have done, as they appeared week by week, or with pauses between, but consecutively, as a popular history of the Metropolitan Police; and, as I suppose it may also be considered, a history of the police force in every large town in England. When I had ended these papers, I did not feel disposed to read any others at that time, but preferred falling into a train of reverie and recollection.

First of all I remembered, with a smile, the unexpected manner in which a relation of mine was discovered by an acquaintance, who had mislaid or forgotten Mr. B.'s address. Now my dear cousin, Mr. B., charming as he is in many points, has the little peculiarity of liking to change his lodgings once every three months on an average, which occasions some bewilderment to his country friends, who have no sooner learnt the 19 Belle Vue Road, Hampstead, than they have to take pains to forget that address, and to remember the 27½ Upper Brown Street, Camberwell; and so on, till I would rather learn a page of "Walker's Pronouncing Dictionary," than try to remember the variety of directions which I have had to put on my letters to Mr. B. during the last three years. Last summer it pleased him to remove to a beautiful village not ten miles out of London, where there is a railway station. Thither his friend sought him. (I do not now speak of the following scent there had

been through three or four different lodgings, where Mr. B. had been residing, before his country friend ascertained that he was now lodging at R——.) He spent the morning in making inquiries as to Mr. B.'s whereabouts in the village; but many gentlemen were lodging there for the summer, and neither butcher nor baker could inform him where Mr. B. was staying; his letters were unknown at the post-office, which was accounted for by the circumstance of their always being directed to his office in town. At last the country friend sauntered back to the railway-office, and while he waited for the train he made inquiry, as a last resource, of the book-keeper at the station. "No, sir, I cannot tell you where Mr. B. lodges—so many gentlemen go by the trains; but I have no doubt but that the person standing by that pillar can inform you." The individual to whom he directed the inquirer's attention had the appearance of a tradesman—respectable enough, yet with no pretensions to "gentility," and had, apparently, no more urgent employment than lazily watching the passengers who came dropping in to the station. However, when he was spoken to, he answered civilly and promptly. "Mr. B.? tall gentleman, with light hair? Yes, sir, I know Mr. B. He lodges at No. 8 Morton Villas—has done these three weeks or more; but you'll not find him there, sir, now. He went to town by the eleven o'clock train, and does not usually return until the half-past four train."

The country friend had no time to lose in returning to the village, to ascertain the truth of this statement. He thanked his informant, and said he would call on Mr. B. at his office in town; but before he left R—— station, he asked the book-keeper who the person was to whom he had referred him for information as to his friend's place of residence. "One of the Detective Police, sir," was the answer. I need hardly say that Mr. B., not without a little surprise, confirmed the accuracy of the policeman's report in every particular.

When I heard this anecdote of my cousin and his friend,

Disappearances

I thought that there could be no more romances written on the same kind of plot as Caleb Williams; the principal interest of which, to the superficial reader, consists in the alternation of hope and fear, that the hero may, or may not, escape his pursuer. It is long since I have read the story, and I forget the name of the offended and injured gentleman whose privacy Caleb has invaded; but I know that his pursuit of Caleb —his detection of the various hiding-places of the latter—his following up of slight clues—all, in fact, depended upon his own energy, sagacity, and perseverance. The interest was caused by the struggle of man against man; and the uncertainty as to which would ultimately be successful in his object: the unrelenting pursuer, or the ingenious Caleb, who seeks by every device to conceal himself. Now, in 1851, the offended master would set the Detective Police to work; there would be no doubt as to their success; the only question would be as to the time that would elapse before the hiding-place could be detected, and that could not be a question long. It is no longer a struggle between man and man, but between a vast organised machinery, and a weak, solitary individual; we have no hopes, no fears—only certainty. But if the materials of pursuit and evasion, as long as the chase is confined to England, are taken away from the store-house of the romancer, at any rate we can no more be haunted by the idea of the possibility of mysterious disappearances; and any one who has associated much with those who were alive at the end of the last century, can testify that there was some reason for such fears.

When I was a child, I was sometimes permitted to accompany a relation to drink tea with a very clever old lady, of one hundred and twenty—or so I thought then; I now think she, perhaps, was only about seventy. She was lively, and intelligent, and had seen and known much that was worth narrating. She was a cousin of the Sneyds, the family whence Mr. Edgeworth took two of his wives; had known Major André; had mixed in the Old Whig Society

that the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire and Mrs. Crewe of "Buff and Blue" fame gathered round them; and her father had been one of the early patrons of the lovely Miss Linley. I name these facts to show that she was too intelligent and cultivated by association, as well as by natural powers, to lend an over-easy credence to the marvellous; and yet I have heard her relate stories of disappearances which haunted my imagination longer than any tale of wonder. One of her stories was this:—Her father's estate lay in Shropshire, and his park-gates opened right on to a scattered village of which he was landlord. The houses formed a straggling irregular street—here a garden, next a gable-end of a farm, there a row of cottages, and so on. Now, at the end house or cottage lived a very respectable man and his wife. They were well known in the village, and were esteemed for the patient attention which they paid to the husband's father, a paralytic old man. In winter, his chair was near the fire; in summer, they carried him out into the open space in front of the house to bask in the sunshine, and to receive what placid amusement he could from watching the little passings to and fro of the villagers. He could not move from his bed to his chair without help. One hot and sultry June day, all the village turned out to the hay-fields. Only the very old and the very young remained.

The old father of whom I have spoken was carried out to bask in the sunshine that afternoon as usual, and his son and daughter-in-law went to the hay-making. But when they came home in the early evening, their paralysed father had disappeared—was gone! and from that day forwards, nothing more was ever heard of him. The old lady, who told this story, said, with the quietness that always marked the simplicity of her narration, that every inquiry which her father could make was made, and that it could never be accounted for. No one had observed any stranger in the village; no small household robbery, to which the old man might have been supposed an obstacle, had been committed in his son's dwelling that afternoon. The son and daughter-

in-law (noted, too, for their attention to the helpless father) had been a-field among all the neighbours the whole of the time. In short, it never was accounted for; and left a painful impression on many minds.

I will answer for it, the Detective Police would have ascertained every fact relating to it in a week.

This story, from its mystery, was painful, but had no consequences to make it tragical. The next which I shall tell (and although traditionary, these anecdotes of disappearances which I relate in this paper are correctly repeated, and were believed by my informants to be strictly true) had consequences, and melancholy ones, too. The scene of it is in a little country-town, surrounded by the estates of several gentlemen of large property. About a hundred years ago there lived in this small town an attorney, with his mother and sister. He was agent for one of the squires near, and received rents for him on stated days, which, of course, were well known. He went at these times to a small public-house, perhaps five miles from ——, where the tenants met him, paid their rents, and were entertained at dinner afterwards. One night he did not return from this festivity. He never returned. The gentleman whose agent he was, employed the Dogberrys of the time to find him, and the missing cash; the mother, whose support and comfort he was, sought him with all the perseverance of faithful love. But he never returned; and by-and-by the rumour spread that he must have gone abroad with the money; his mother heard the whispers all around her, and could not disprove it; and so her heart broke, and she died. Years after, I think as many as fifty, the well-to-do butcher and grazier of —— died; but, before his death, he confessed that he had waylaid Mr. —— on the heath, close to the town, almost within call of his own house, intending only to rob him, but, meeting with more resistance than he anticipated, had been provoked to stab him; and had buried him that very night deep under the loose sand of the heath. There his skeleton was found; but too late for his poor

mother to know that his fame was cleared. His sister, too, was dead, unmarried, for no one liked the possibilities which might arise from being connected with the family. None cared if he were guilty or innocent now.

If our Detective Police had only been in existence!

This last is hardly a story of unaccounted-for disappearance. It is only unaccounted for in one generation. But disappearances never to be accounted for on any supposition are not uncommon among the traditions of the last century. I have heard (and I think I have read it in one of the earlier numbers of *Chambers's Journal*) of a marriage which took place in Lincolnshire about the year 1750. It was not then *de rigueur* that the happy couple should set out on a wedding journey; but instead, they and their friends had a merry jovial dinner at the house of either bride or groom; and in this instance the whole party adjourned to the bridegroom's residence, and dispersed, some to ramble in the garden, some to rest in the house until the dinner-hour. The bridegroom, it is to be supposed, was with his bride, when he was suddenly summoned away by a domestic, who said that a stranger wished to speak to him; and henceforward he was never seen more. The same tradition hangs about an old deserted Welsh hall standing in a wood near Festiniog; there, too, the bridegroom was sent for to give audience to a stranger on his wedding-day, and disappeared from the face of the earth from that time; but there, they tell in addition, that the bride lived long—that she passed her three-score years and ten, but that daily, during all those years, while there was light of sun or moon to lighten the earth, she sat watching—watching at one particular window which commanded a view of the approach to the house. Her whole faculties, her whole mental powers, became absorbed in that weary watching; long before she died, she was childish, and only conscious of one wish—to sit in that long high window, and watch the road along which he might come. She was as faithful as Evangeline, if pensive and inglorious.

That these two similar stories of disappearance on a wedding-day "obtained," as the French say, shows us that anything which adds to our facility of communication, and organisation of means, adds to our security of life. Only let a bridegroom try to disappear from an untamed *Katherine* of a bride, and he will soon be brought home, like a recreant coward, overtaken by the electric telegraph, and clutched back to his fate by a detective policeman.

Two more stories of disappearance and I have done. I will give you the last in date first, because it is the most melancholy; and we will wind up cheerfully (after a fashion). Some time between 1820 and 1830, there lived in North Shields a respectable old woman, and her son, who was trying to struggle into sufficient knowledge of medicine to go out as ship-surgeon in a Baltic vessel, and perhaps in this manner to earn money enough to spend a session in Edinburgh. He was furthered in all his plans by the late benevolent Dr. G. of that town. I believe the usual premium was not required in his case; the young man did many useful errands and offices which a finer young gentleman would have considered beneath him; and he resided with his mother in one of the alleys (or "chares") which lead down from the main street of North Shields to the river. Dr. G. had been with a patient all night, and left her very early on a winter's morning to return home to bed; but first he stepped down to his apprentice's home, and bade him get up, and follow him to his own house, where some medicine was to be mixed, and then taken to the lady. Accordingly, the poor lad came, prepared the dose, and set off with it some time between five and six on a winter's morning. He was never seen again. Dr. G. waited, thinking he was at his mother's house; she waited, considering that he had gone to his day's work. And meanwhile, as people remembered afterwards, the small vessel bound to Edinburgh sailed out of port. The mother expected him back her whole life long; but some years afterwards occurred the discoveries of the Hare and Burke horrors, and people

seemed to gain a dark glimpse at his fate; but I never heard that it was fully ascertained, or indeed more than surmised. I ought to add that all who knew him spoke emphatically as to his steadiness of purpose and conduct, so as to render it improbable in the highest degree that he had run off to sea, or suddenly changed his plan of life in any way.

My last story is one of a disappearance which was accounted for after many years. There is a considerable street in Manchester leading from the centre of the town to some of the suburbs. This street is called at one part Garratt, and afterwards—where it emerges into gentility and, comparatively, country—Brook Street. It derives its former name from an old black-and-white hall of the time of Richard the Third, or thereabouts, to judge from the style of building; they have closed in what is left of the old hall now; but a few years since this old house was visible from the main road; it stood low on some vacant ground, and appeared to be half in ruins. I believe it was occupied by several poor families, who rented tenements in the tumble-down dwelling. But formerly it was Gerrard Hall (what a difference between Gerrard and Garratt!) and was surrounded by a park with a clear brook running through it, with pleasant fish-ponds (the name of these was preserved, until very lately, on a street near), orchards, dovecots, and similar appurtenances to the manor-houses of former days. I am almost sure that the family to whom it belonged were Mosleys, probably a branch of the tree of the Lord of the Manor of Manchester. Any topographical work of the last century relating to their district would give the name of the last proprietor of the old stock, and it is to him that my story refers.

Many years ago there lived in Manchester two old maiden ladies of high respectability. All their lives had been spent in the town, and they were fond of relating the changes which had taken place within their recollection, which extended back to seventy or eighty years from the present

time. They knew much of its traditionary history from their father, as well; who, with his father before him, had been respectable attorneys in Manchester during the greater part of the last century; they were, also, agents for several of the county families, who, driven from their old possessions by the enlargement of the town, found some compensation in the increased value of any land which they might choose to sell. Consequently the Messrs. S., father and son, were conveyancers in good repute, and acquainted with several secret pieces of family history, one of which related to Garratt Hall.

The owner of this estate, some time in the first half of the last century, married young; he and his wife had several children, and lived together in a quiet state of happiness for many years. At last, business of some kind took the husband up to London; a week's journey in those days. He wrote and announced his arrival; I do not think he ever wrote again. He seemed to be swallowed up in the abyss of the metropolis, for no friend (and the lady had many powerful friends) could ever ascertain for her what had become of him; the prevalent idea was that he had been attacked by some of the street-robbers who prowled about in those days, that he had resisted, and had been murdered. His wife gradually gave up all hopes of seeing him again, and devoted herself to the care of her children; and so they went on, tranquilly enough, until the heir came of age, when certain deeds were necessary before he could legally take possession of the property. These deeds Mr. S. (the family lawyer) stated had been given up by him into the missing gentleman's keeping just before the last mysterious journey to London, with which I think they were in some way concerned. It was possible that they were still in existence; some one in London might have them in possession, and be either conscious or unconscious of their importance. At any rate, Mr. S.'s advice to his client was that he should put an advertisement in the London papers, worded so skilfully that any one who might hold the important documents should

understand to what it referred, and no one else. This was accordingly done; and, although repeated at intervals for some time, it met with no success. But at last a mysterious answer was sent: to the effect that the deeds were in existence, and should be given up; but only on certain conditions, and to the heir himself. The young man, in consequence, went up to London, and adjourned, according to directions, to an old house in Barbican, where he was told by a man, apparently awaiting him, that he must submit to be blindfolded, and must follow his guidance. He was taken through several long passages before he left the house; at the termination of one of these he was put into a sedan-chair, and carried about for an hour or more; he always reported that there were many turnings, and that he imagined he was set down finally not very far from his starting-point.

When his eyes were unbandaged, he was in a decent sitting-room, with tokens of family occupation lying about. A middle-aged gentleman entered, and told him that, until a certain time had elapsed (which should be indicated to him in a particular way, but of which the length was not then named), he must swear to secrecy as to the means by which he obtained possession of the deeds. This oath was taken; and then the gentleman, not without some emotion, acknowledged himself to be the missing father of the heir. It seems that he had fallen in love with a damsel, a friend of the person with whom he lodged. To this young woman he had represented himself as unmarried; she listened willingly to his wooing, and her father, who was a shopkeeper in the City, was not averse to the match, as the Lancashire squire had a goodly presence, and many similar qualities, which the shopkeeper thought might be acceptable to his customers. The bargain was struck; the descendant of a knightly race married the only daughter of the City shopkeeper, and became the junior partner in the business. He told his son that he had never repented the step he had taken; that his lowly-born wife was sweet, docile, and affectionate; that his

family by her was large; and that he and they were thriving and happy. He inquired after his first (or rather, I should say, his true) wife with friendly affection; approved of what she had done with regard to his estate, and the education of his children; but said that he considered he was dead to her as she was to him. When he really died he promised that a particular message, the nature of which he specified, should be sent to his son at Garratt; until then they would not hear more of each other, for it was of no use attempting to trace him under his incognito, even if the oath did not render such an attempt forbidden. I dare say the youth had no great desire to trace out the father, who had been one in name only. He returned to Lancashire; took possession of the property at Manchester; and many years elapsed before he received the mysterious intimation of his father's real death. After that, he named the particulars connected with the recovery of the title-deeds to Mr. S., and one or two intimate friends. When the family became extinct, or removed from Garratt, it became no longer any very closely-kept secret, and I was told the tale of the disappearance by Miss S., the aged daughter of the family agent.

Once more, let me say, I am thankful I live in the days of the Detective Police; if I am murdered, or commit bigamy, at any rate my friends will have the comfort of knowing all about it.

. . . . . .

A correspondent has favoured us with the sequel of the disappearance of the pupil of Dr. G., who vanished from North Shields, in charge of certain potions he was entrusted with, very early one morning, to convey to a patient: "Dr. G.'s son married my sister, and the young man who disappeared was a pupil in the house. When he went out with the medicine, he was hardly dressed, having merely thrown on some clothes; and he went in slippers—which incidents induced the belief that he was made away with. After some months his family put on mourning; and the

G.'s (*very* timid people) were so sure that he was murdered, that they wrote verses to his memory, and became sadly worn by terror. But, after a long time (I fancy, but am not sure, about a year and a half), came a letter from the young man, who was doing well in America. His explanation was, that a vessel was lying at the wharf about to sail in the morning, and the youth, who had long meditated evasion, thought it a good opportunity, and stepped on board, after leaving the medicine at the proper door. I spent some weeks at Dr. G.'s after the occurrence; and very doleful we used to be about it. But the next time I went they were, naturally, very angry with the inconsiderate young man."

THE OLD NURSE'S STORY

You know, my dears, that your mother was an orphan, and an only child; and I dare say you have heard that your grandfather was a clergyman up in Westmoreland, where I come from. I was just a girl in the village school, when, one day, your grandmother came in to ask the mistress if there was any scholar there who would do for a nurse-maid; and mighty proud I was, I can tell ye, when the mistress called me up, and spoke to my being a good girl at my needle, and a steady, honest girl, and one whose parents were very respectable, though they might be poor. I thought I should like nothing better than to serve the pretty young lady, who was blushing as deep as I was, as she spoke of the coming baby, and what I should have to do with it. However, I see you don't care so much for this part of my story, as for what you think is to come, so I'll tell you at once. I was engaged and settled at the parsonage before Miss Rosamond (that was the baby, who is now your mother) was born. To be sure, I had little enough to do with her when she came, for she was never out of her mother's arms, and slept by her all night long; and proud enough was I sometimes when missis trusted her to me. There never was such a baby before or since, though you've all of you been fine enough in your turns; but for sweet, winning ways, you've none of you come up to your mother. She took after her mother, who was a real lady born; a Miss Furnivall, a grand-daughter of Lord Furnivall's, in Northumberland. I believe she had neither brother nor sister, and had been brought up in my lord's family till she had married your grandfather, who was just a curate, son

to a shopkeeper in Carlisle—but a clever, fine gentleman as ever was—and one who was a right-down hard worker in his parish, which was very wide, and scattered all abroad over the Westmoreland Fells. When your mother, little Miss Rosamond, was about four or five years old, both her parents died in a fortnight—one after the other. Ah! that was a sad time. My pretty young mistress and me was looking for another baby, when my master came home from one of his long rides, wet and tired, and took the fever he died of; and then she never held up her head again, but just lived to see her dead baby, and have it laid on her breast, before she sighed away her life. My mistress had asked me, on her death-bed, never to leave Miss Rosamond; but if she had never spoken a word, I would have gone with the little child to the end of the world.

The next thing, and before we had well stilled our sobs, the executors and guardians came to settle the affairs. They were my poor young mistress's own cousin, Lord Furnivall, and Mr. Esthwaite, my master's brother, a shopkeeper in Manchester; not so well-to-do then as he was afterwards, and with a large family rising about him. Well! I don't know if it were their settling, or because of a letter my mistress wrote on her death-bed to her cousin, my lord; but somehow it was settled that Miss Rosamond and me were to go to Furnivall Manor House, in Northumberland; and my lord spoke as if it had been her mother's wish that she should live with his family, and as if he had no objections, for that one or two more or less could make no difference in so grand a household. So, though that was not the way in which I should have wished the coming of my bright and pretty pet to have been looked at—who was like a sunbeam in any family, be it never so grand—I was well pleased that all the folks in the Dale should stare and admire, when they heard I was going to be young lady's maid at my Lord Furnivall's at Furnivall Manor.

But I made a mistake in thinking we were to go and live where my lord did. It turned out that the family had left

Furnivall Manor House fifty years or more. I could not hear that my poor young mistress had ever been there, though she had been brought up in the family; and I was sorry for that, for I should have liked Miss Rosamond's youth to have passed where her mother's had been.

My lord's gentleman, from whom I asked as many questions as I durst, said that the Manor House was at the foot of the Cumberland Fells, and a very grand place; that an old Miss Furnivall, a great-aunt of my lord's, lived there, with only a few servants; but that it was a very healthy place, and my lord had thought that it would suit Miss Rosamond very well for a few years, and that her being there might perhaps amuse his old aunt.

I was bidden by my lord to have Miss Rosamond's things ready by a certain day. He was a stern, proud man, as they say all the Lords Furnivall were; and he never spoke a word more than was necessary. Folk did say he had loved my young mistress; but that, because she knew that his father would object, she would never listen to him, and married Mr. Esthwaite; but I don't know. He never married, at any rate. But he never took much notice of Miss Rosamond; which I thought he might have done if he had cared for her dead mother. He sent his gentleman with us to the Manor House, telling him to join him at Newcastle that same evening; so there was no great length of time for him to make us known to all the strangers before he, too, shook us off; and we were left, two lonely young things (I was not eighteen) in the great old Manor House. It seems like yesterday that we drove there. We had left our own dear parsonage very early, and we had both cried as if our hearts would break, though we were travelling in my lord's carriage, which I thought so much of once. And now it was long past noon on a September day, and we stopped to change horses for the last time at a little smoky town, all full of colliers and miners. Miss Rosamond had fallen asleep, but Mr. Henry told me to waken her, that she might see the park and the Manor House as we drove up. I thought it

rather a pity; but I did what he bade me, for fear he should complain of me to my lord. We had left all signs of a town, or even a village, and were then inside the gates of a large, wild park—not like the parks here in the south, but with rocks, and the noise of running water, and gnarled thorn-trees, and old oaks, all white and peeled with age.

The road went up about two miles, and then we saw a great and stately house, with many trees close around it, so close that in some places their branches dragged against the walls when the wind blew, and some hung broken down; for no one seemed to take much charge of the place;—to lop the wood, or to keep the moss-covered carriage-way in order. Only in front of the house all was clear. The great oval drive was without a weed; and neither tree nor creeper was allowed to grow over the long, many-windowed front; at both sides of which a wing projected, which were each the ends of other side fronts; for the house, although it was so desolate, was even grander than I expected. Behind it rose the Fells, which seemed unenclosed and bare enough; and on the left hand of the house, as you stood facing it, was a little, old-fashioned flower-garden, as I found out afterwards. A door opened out upon it from the west front; it had been scooped out of the thick, dark wood for some old Lady Furnivall; but the branches of the great forest-trees had grown and overshadowed it again, and there were very few flowers that would live there at that time.

When we drove up to the great front entrance, and went into the hall, I thought we should be lost—it was so large, and vast, and grand. There was a chandelier all of bronze, hung down from the middle of the ceiling; and I had never seen one before, and looked at it all in amaze. Then, at one end of the hall, was a great fireplace, as large as the sides of the houses in my country, with massy andirons and dogs to hold the wood; and by it were heavy, old-fashioned sofas. At the opposite end of the hall, to the left as you went in—on the western side—was an organ built into the wall, and so large that it filled up the best part of that end. Beyond

it, on the same side, was a door; and opposite, on each side of the fireplace, were also doors leading to the east front; but those I never went through as long as I stayed in the house, so I can't tell you what lay beyond.

The afternoon was closing in, and the hall, which had no fire lighted in it, looked dark and gloomy; but we did not stay there a moment. The old servant, who had opened the door for us, bowed to Mr. Henry, and took us in through the door at the further side of the great organ, and led us through several smaller halls and passages into the west drawing-room, where he said that Miss Furnivall was sitting. Poor little Miss Rosamond held very tight to me, as if she were scared and lost in that great place; and as for myself, I was not much better. The west drawing-room was very cheerful-looking, with a warm fire in it, and plenty of good, comfortable furniture about. Miss Furnivall was an old lady not far from eighty, I should think, but I do not know. She was thin and tall, and had a face as full of fine wrinkles as if they had been drawn all over it with a needle's point. Her eyes were very watchful, to make up, I suppose, for her being so deaf as to be obliged to use a trumpet. Sitting with her, working at the same great piece of tapestry, was Mrs. Stark, her maid and companion, and almost as old as she was. She had lived with Miss Furnivall ever since they both were young, and now she seemed more like a friend than a servant; she looked so cold, and grey, and stony, as if she had never loved or cared for any one; and I don't suppose she did care for any one, except her mistress; and, owing to the great deafness of the latter, Mrs. Stark treated her very much as if she were a child. Mr. Henry gave some message from my lord, and then he bowed good-bye to us all—taking no notice of my sweet little Miss Rosamond's outstretched hand—and left us standing there, being looked at by the two old ladies through their spectacles.

I was right glad when they rung for the old footman who had shown us in at first, and told him to take us to our rooms. So we went out of that great drawing-room, and

into another sitting-room, and out of that, and then up a great flight of stairs, and along a broad gallery—which was something like a library, having books all down one side, and windows and writing-tables all down the other—till we came to our rooms, which I was not sorry to hear were just over the kitchens; for I began to think I should be lost in that wilderness of a house. There was an old nursery, that had been used for all the little lords and ladies long ago, with a pleasant fire burning in the grate, and the kettle boiling on the hob, and tea-things spread out on the table; and out of that room was the night-nursery, with a little crib for Miss Rosamond close to my bed. And old James called up Dorothy, his wife, to bid us welcome; and both he and she were so hospitable and kind, that by-and-by Miss Rosamond and me felt quite at home; and by the time tea was over, she was sitting on Dorothy's knee, and chattering away as fast as her little tongue could go. I soon found out that Dorothy was from Westmoreland, and that bound her and me together, as it were; and I would never wish to meet with kinder people than were old James and his wife. James had lived pretty nearly all his life in my lord's family, and thought there was no one so grand as they. He even looked down a little on his wife; because, till he had married her, she had never lived in any but a farmer's household. But he was very fond of her, as well he might be. They had one servant under them, to do all the rough work. Agnes they called her; and she and me, and James and Dorothy, with Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark, made up the family; always remembering my sweet little Miss Rosamond! I used to wonder what they had done before she came, they thought so much of her now. Kitchen and drawing-room, it was all the same. The hard, sad Miss Furnivall, and the cold Mrs. Stark, looked pleased when she came fluttering in like a bird, playing and pranking hither and thither, with a continual murmur, and pretty prattle of gladness. I am sure, they were sorry many a time when she flitted away into the kitchen, though they were too proud to ask her to

stay with them, and were a little surprised at her taste; though to be sure, as Mrs. Stark said, it was not to be wondered at, remembering what stock her father had come of. The great, old rambling house was a famous place for little Miss Rosamond. She made expeditions all over it, with me at her heels: all, except the east wing, which was never opened, and whither we never thought of going. But in the western and northern part was many a pleasant room; full of things that were curiosities to us, though they might not have been to people who had seen more. The windows were darkened by the sweeping boughs of the trees, and the ivy which had overgrown them; but, in the green gloom, we could manage to see old china jars and carved ivory boxes, and great heavy books, and, above all, the old pictures!

Once, I remember, my darling would have Dorothy go with us to tell us who they all were; for they were all portraits of some of my lord's family, though Dorothy could not tell us the names of every one. We had gone through most of the rooms, when we came to the old state drawing-room over the hall, and there was a picture of Miss Furnivall; or, as she was called in those days, Miss Grace, for she was the younger sister. Such a beauty she must have been! but with such a set, proud look, and such scorn looking out of her handsome eyes, with her eyebrows just a little raised, as if she wondered how any one could have the impertinence to look at her, and her lip curled at us, as we stood there gazing. She had a dress on, the like of which I had never seen before, but it was all the fashion when she was young: a hat of some soft white stuff like beaver, pulled a little over her brows, and a beautiful plume of feathers sweeping round it on one side; and her gown of blue satin was open in front to a quilted white stomacher.

"Well, to be sure!" said I, when I had gazed my fill. "Flesh is grass, they do say; but who would have thought that Miss Furnivall had been such an out-and-out beauty, to see her now?"

"Yes," said Dorothy. "Folks change sadly. But if

what my master's father used to say was true, Miss Furnivall, the elder sister, was handsomer than Miss Grace. Her picture is here somewhere; but, if I show it you, you must never let on, even to James, that you have seen it. Can the little lady hold her tongue, think you?" asked she.

I was not so sure, for she was such a little sweet, bold, open-spoken child, so I set her to hide herself; and then I helped Dorothy to turn a great picture, that leaned with its face towards the wall, and was not hung up as the others were. To be sure, it beat Miss Grace for beauty; and, I think, for scornful pride, too, though in that matter it might be hard to choose. I could have looked at it an hour, but Dorothy seemed half frightened at having shown it to me, and hurried it back again, and bade me run and find Miss Rosamond, for that there were some ugly places about the house, where she should like ill for the child to go. I was a brave, high-spirited girl, and thought little of what the old woman said, for I liked hide-and-seek as well as any child in the parish; so off I ran to find my little one.

As winter drew on, and the days grew shorter, I was sometimes almost certain that I heard a noise as if some one was playing on the great organ in the hall. I did not hear it every evening; but, certainly, I did very often, usually when I was sitting with Miss Rosamond, after I had put her to bed, and keeping quite still and silent in the bedroom. Then I used to hear it booming and swelling away in the distance. The first night, when I went down to my supper, I asked Dorothy who had been playing music, and James said very shortly that I was a gowk to take the wind soughing among the trees for music; but I saw Dorothy look at him very fearfully, and Bessy, the kitchen-maid, said something beneath her breath, and went quite white. I saw they did not like my question, so I held my peace till I was with Dorothy alone, when I knew I could get a good deal out of her. So, the next day, I watched my time, and I coaxed and asked her who it was that played the organ; for I knew that it was the organ and not the wind well

enough, for all I had kept silence before James. But Dorothy had had her lesson, I'll warrant, and never a word could I get from her. So then I tried Bessy, though I had always held my head rather above her, as I was evened to James and Dorothy, and she was little better than their servant. So she said I must never, never tell; and if ever I told, I was never to say *she* had told me; but it was a very strange noise, and she had heard it many a time, but most of all on winter nights, and before storms; and folks did say it was the old lord playing on the great organ in the hall, just as he used to do when he was alive; but who the old lord was, or why he played, and why he played on stormy winter evenings in particular, she either could not or would not tell me. Well! I told you I had a brave heart; and I thought it was rather pleasant to have that grand music rolling about the house, let who would be the player; for now it rose above the great gusts of wind, and wailed and triumphed just like a living creature, and then it fell to a softness most complete, only it was always music, and tunes, so it was nonsense to call it the wind. I thought at first, that it might be Miss Furnivall who played, unknown to Bessy; but one day, when I was in the hall by myself, I opened the organ and peeped all about it and around it, as I had done to the organ in Crosthwaite Church once before, and I saw it was all broken and destroyed inside, though it looked so brave and fine; and then, though it was noonday, my flesh began to creep a little, and I shut it up, and run away pretty quickly to my own bright nursery; and I did not like hearing the music for some time after that, any more than James and Dorothy did. All this time Miss Rosamond was making herself more and more beloved. The old ladies liked her to dine with them at their early dinner. James stood behind Miss Furnivall's chair, and I behind Miss Rosamond's all in state; and, after dinner, she would play about in a corner of the great drawing-room as still as any mouse, while Miss Furnivall slept, and I had my dinner in the kitchen. But she was glad enough

to come to me in the nursery afterwards; for, as she said, Miss Furnivall was so sad, and Mrs. Stark so dull; but she and I were merry enough; and, by-and-by, I got not to care for that weird rolling music, which did one no harm, if we did not know where it came from.

That winter was very cold. In the middle of October the frosts began, and lasted many, many weeks. I remember one day, at dinner, Miss Furnivall lifted up her sad, heavy eyes, and said to Mrs. Stark, "I am afraid we shall have a terrible winter," in a strange kind of meaning way. But Mrs. Stark pretended not to hear, and talked very loud of something else. My little lady and I did not care for the frost; not we! As long as it was dry, we climbed up the steep brows behind the house, and went up on the Fells, which were bleak and bare enough, and there we ran races in the fresh, sharp air; and once we came down by a new path, that took us past the two old gnarled holly-trees, which grew about half-way down by the east side of the house. But the days grew shorter and shorter, and the old lord, if it was he, played away, more and more stormily and sadly, on the great organ. One Sunday afternoon—it must have been towards the end of November—I asked Dorothy to take charge of little missy when she came out of the drawing-room, after Miss Furnivall had had her nap; for it was too cold to take her with me to church, and yet I wanted to go. And Dorothy was glad enough to promise, and was so fond of the child, that all seemed well; and Bessy and I set off very briskly, though the sky hung heavy and black over the white earth, as if the night had never fully gone away, and the air, though still, was very biting and keen.

"We shall have a fall of snow," said Bessy to me. And sure enough, even while we were in church, it came down thick, in great large flakes—so thick, it almost darkened the windows. It had stopped snowing before we came out, but it lay soft, thick, and deep beneath our feet, as we tramped home. Before we got to the hall, the moon rose, and I

think it was lighter then—what with the moon, and what with the white dazzling snow—than it had been when we went to church, between two and three o'clock. I have not told you that Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark never went to church; they used to read the prayers together, in their quiet, gloomy way; they seemed to feel the Sunday very long without their tapestry-work to be busy at. So when I went to Dorothy in the kitchen, to fetch Miss Rosamond and take her upstairs with me, I did not much wonder when the old woman told me that the ladies had kept the child with them, and that she had never come to the kitchen, as I had bidden her, when she was tired of behaving pretty in the drawing-room. So I took off my things and went to find her, and bring her to her supper in the nursery. But when I went into the best drawing-room, there sat the two old ladies, very still and quiet, dropping out a word now and then, but looking as if nothing so bright and merry as Miss Rosamond had ever been near them. Still I thought she might be hiding from me; it was one of her pretty ways,—and that she had persuaded them to look as if they knew nothing about her; so I went softly peeping under this sofa, and behind that chair, making believe I was sadly frightened at not finding her.

"What's the matter, Hester?" said Mrs. Stark sharply. I don't know if Miss Furnivall had seen me, for, as I told you, she was very deaf, and she sat quite still, idly staring into the fire, with her hopeless face. "I'm only looking for my little Rosy Posy," replied I, still thinking that the child was there, and near me, though I could not see her.

"Miss Rosamond is not here," said Mrs. Stark. "She went away, more than an hour ago, to find Dorothy." And she, too, turned and went on looking into the fire.

My heart sank at this, and I began to wish I had never left my darling. I went back to Dorothy and told her. James was gone out for the day, but she, and me, and Bessy took lights, and went up into the nursery first; and then we roamed over the great, large house, calling and entreating

Miss Rosamond to come out of her hiding-place, and not frighten us to death in that way. But there was no answer; no sound.

"Oh!" said I, at last, "can she have got into the east wing and hidden there?"

But Dorothy said it was not possible, for that she herself had never been in there; that the doors were always locked, and my lord's steward had the keys, she believed; at any rate, neither she nor James had ever seen them: so I said I would go back, and see if, after all, she was not hidden in the drawing-room, unknown to the old ladies; and if I found her there, I said, I would whip her well for the fright she had given me; but I never meant to do it. Well, I went back to the west drawing-room, and I told Mrs. Stark we could not find her anywhere, and asked for leave to look all about the furniture there, for I thought now that she might have fallen asleep in some warm, hidden corner; but no! we looked—Miss Furnivall got up and looked, trembling all over—and she was nowhere there; then we set off again, every one in the house, and looked in all the places we had searched before, but we could not find her. Miss Furnivall shivered and shook so much, that Mrs. Stark took her back into the warm drawing-room; but not before they had made me promise to bring her to them when she was found. Well-a-day! I began to think she never would be found, when I bethought me to look into the great front court, all covered with snow. I was upstairs when I looked out; but, it was such clear moonlight, I could see, quite plain, two little footprints, which might be traced from the hall-door and round the corner of the east wing. I don't know how I got down, but I tugged open the great stiff hall-door, and, throwing the skirt of my gown over my head for a cloak, I ran out. I turned the east corner, and there a black shadow fell on the snow; but when I came again into the moonlight, there were the little footmarks going up—up to the Fells. It was bitter cold; so cold, that the air almost took the skin off my face as I ran; but I ran on, crying to think how my

poor little darling must be perished and frightened. I was within sight of the holly-trees, when I saw a shepherd coming down the hill, bearing something in his arms wrapped in his maud. He shouted to me, and asked me if I had lost a bairn; and, when I could not speak for crying, he bore towards me, and I saw my wee bairnie, lying still, and white, and stiff in his arms, as if she had been dead. He told me he had been up the Fells to gather in his sheep, before the deep cold of night came on, and that under the holly-trees (black marks on the hill-side, where no other bush was for miles around) he had found my little lady—my lamb—my queen—my darling—stiff and cold in the terrible sleep which is frost-begotten. Oh! the joy and the tears of having her in my arms once again! for I would not let him carry her; but took her, maud and all, into my own arms, and held her near my own warm neck and heart, and felt the life stealing slowly back again into her little gentle limbs. But she was still insensible when we reached the hall, and I had no breath for speech. We went in by the kitchen-door.

"Bring the warming-pan," said I; and I carried her upstairs, and began undressing her by the nursery fire, which Bessy had kept up. I called my little lammie all the sweet and playful names I could think of,—even while my eyes were blinded by my tears; and at last, oh! at length she opened her large blue eyes. Then I put her into her warm bed, and sent Dorothy down to tell Miss Furnivall that all was well; and I made up my mind to sit by my darling's bedside the live-long night. She fell away into a soft sleep as soon as her pretty head had touched the pillow, and I watched by her till morning light; when she wakened up bright and clear—or so I thought at first—and, my dears, so I think now.

She said, that she had fancied that she should like to go to Dorothy, for that both the old ladies were asleep, and it was very dull in the drawing-room; and that, as she was going through the west lobby, she saw the snow through the high window falling—falling—soft and steady; but she wanted to

see it lying pretty and white on the ground; so she made her way into the great hall: and then, going to the window, she saw it bright and soft upon the drive; but while she stood there, she saw a little girl, not so old as she was, "but so pretty," said my darling; "and this little girl beckoned to me to come out; and oh, she was so pretty and so sweet, I could not choose but go." And then this other little girl had taken her by the hand, and side by side the two had gone round the east corner.

"Now you are a naughty little girl, and telling stories," said I. "What would your good mamma, that is in heaven, and never told a story in her life, say to her little Rosamond, if she heard her—and I dare say she does—telling stories!"

"Indeed, Hester," sobbed out my child, "I'm telling you true. Indeed I am."

"Don't tell me!" said I, very stern. "I tracked you by your foot-marks through the snow; there were only yours to be seen: and if you had had a little girl to go hand-in-hand with you up the hill, don't you think the footprints would have gone along with yours?"

"I can't help it, dear, dear Hester," said she, crying, "if they did not; I never looked at her feet, but she held my hand fast and tight in her little one, and it was very, very cold. She took me up the Fell-path, up to the holly-trees; and there I saw a lady weeping and crying; but when she saw me, she hushed her weeping, and smiled very proud and grand, and took me on her knee, and began to lull me to sleep; and that's all, Hester—but that is true; and my dear mamma knows it is," said she, crying. So I thought the child was in a fever, and pretended to believe her, as she went over her story—over and over again, and always the same. At last Dorothy knocked at the door with Miss Rosamond's breakfast; and she told me the old ladies were down in the eating parlour, and that they wanted to speak to me. They had both been into the night-nursery the evening before, but it was after Miss Rosamond was asleep; so they had only looked at her—not asked me any questions.

"I shall catch it," thought I to myself, as I went along the north gallery. "And yet," I thought, taking courage, "it was in their charge I left her; and it's they that's to blame for letting her steal away unknown and unwatched." So I went in boldly, and told my story. I told it all to Miss Furnivall, shouting it close to her ear; but when I came to the mention of the other little girl out in the snow, coaxing and tempting her out, and wiling her up to the grand and beautiful lady by the holly-tree, she threw her arms up—her old and withered arms—and cried aloud, "Oh! Heaven forgive! Have mercy!"

Mrs. Stark took hold of her; roughly enough, I thought; but she was past Mrs. Stark's management, and spoke to me, in a kind of wild warning and authority.

"Hester! keep her from that child! It will lure her to her death! That evil child! Tell her it is a wicked, naughty child." Then, Mrs. Stark hurried me out of the room; where, indeed, I was glad enough to go; but Miss Furnivall kept shrieking out, "Oh, have mercy! Wilt Thou never forgive! It is many a long year ago"——

I was very uneasy in my mind after that. I durst never leave Miss Rosamond, night or day, for fear lest she might slip off again, after some fancy or other; and all the more, because I thought I could make out that Miss Furnivall was crazy, from their odd ways about her; and I was afraid lest something of the same kind (which might be in the family, you know) hung over my darling. And the great frost never ceased all this time; and, whenever it was a more stormy night than usual, between the gusts, and through the wind, we heard the old lord playing on the great organ. But, old lord, or not, wherever Miss Rosamond went, there I followed; for my love for her, pretty, helpless orphan, was stronger than my fear for the grand and terrible sound. Besides, it rested with me to keep her cheerful and merry, as beseemed her age. So we played together, and wandered together, here and there, and everywhere; for I never dared to lose sight of her again in that large and rambling house. And so it

happened, that one afternoon, not long before Christmas-day, we were playing together on the billiard-table in the great hall (not that we knew the right way of playing, but she liked to roll the smooth ivory balls with her pretty hands, and I liked to do whatever she did); and, by-and-by, without our noticing it, it grew dusk indoors, though it was still light in the open air, and I was thinking of taking her back into the nursery, when, all of a sudden, she cried out—

"Look, Hester! look! there is my poor little girl out in the snow!"

I turned towards the long narrow windows, and there, sure enough, I saw a little girl, less than my Miss Rosamond —dressed all unfit to be out-of-doors such a bitter night—crying, and beating against the window panes, as if she wanted to be let in. She seemed to sob and wail, till Miss Rosamond could bear it no longer, and was flying to the door to open it, when, all of a sudden, and close upon us, the great organ pealed out so loud and thundering, it fairly made me tremble; and all the more, when I remembered me that, even in the stillness of that dead-cold weather, I had heard no sound of little battering hands upon the window-glass, although the phantom child had seemed to put forth all its force; and, although I had seen it wail and cry, no faintest touch of sound had fallen upon my ears. Whether I remembered all this at the very moment, I do not know; the great organ sound had so stunned me into terror; but this I know, I caught up Miss Rosamond before she got the hall-door opened, and clutched her, and carried her away, kicking and screaming, into the large, bright kitchen, where Dorothy and Agnes were busy with their mince-pies.

"What is the matter with my sweet one?" cried Dorothy, as I bore in Miss Rosamond, who was sobbing as if her heart would break.

"She won't let me open the door for my little girl to come in; and she'll die if she is out on the Fells all night. Cruel, naughty Hester," she said, slapping me; but she might have struck harder, for I had seen a look of ghastly

terror on Dorothy's face, which made my very blood run cold.

"Shut the back-kitchen door fast, and bolt it well," said she to Agnes. She said no more; she gave me raisins and almonds to quiet Miss Rosamond; but she sobbed about the little girl in the snow, and would not touch any of the good things. I was thankful when she cried herself to sleep in bed. Then I stole down to the kitchen, and told Dorothy I had made up my mind. I would carry my darling back to my father's house in Applethwaite; where, if we lived humbly, we lived at peace. I said I had been frightened enough with the old lord's organ-playing; but now that I had seen for myself this little moaning child, all decked out as no child in the neighbourhood could be, beating and battering to get in, yet always without any sound or noise—with the dark wound on its right shoulder; and that Miss Rosamond had known it again for the phantom that had nearly lured her to death (which Dorothy knew was true); I would stand it no longer.

I saw Dorothy change colour once or twice. When I had done, she told me she did not think I could take Miss Rosamond with me, for that she was my lord's ward, and I had no right over her; and she asked me would I leave the child that I was so fond of just for sounds and sights that could do me no harm; and that they had all had to get used to in their turns? I was all in a hot, trembling passion; and I said it was very well for her to talk, that knew what these sights and noises betokened, and that had, perhaps, had something to do with the spectre child while it was alive. And I taunted her so, that she told me all she knew at last; and then I wished I had never been told, for it only made me more afraid than ever.

She said she had heard the tale from old neighbours that were alive when she was first married; when folks used to come to the hall sometimes, before it had got such a bad name on the country side: it might not be true, or it might, what she had been told.

The old lord was Miss Furnivall's father—Miss Grace, as Dorothy called her, for Miss Maude was the elder, and Miss Furnivall by rights. The old lord was eaten up with pride. Such a proud man was never seen or heard of; and his daughters were like him. No one was good enough to wed them, although they had choice enough; for they were the great beauties of their day, as I had seen by their portraits, where they hung in the state drawing-room. But, as the old saying is, "Pride will have a fall;" and these two haughty beauties fell in love with the same man, and he no better than a foreign musician, whom their father had down from London to play music with him at the Manor House. For, above all things, next to his pride, the old lord loved music. He could play on nearly every instrument that ever was heard of; and it was a strange thing it did not soften him; but he was a fierce, dour old man, and had broken his poor wife's heart with his cruelty, they said. He was mad after music, and would pay any money for it. So he got this foreigner to come; who made such beautiful music, that they said the very birds on the trees stopped their singing to listen. And, by degrees, this foreign gentleman got such a hold over the old lord, that nothing would serve him but that he must come every year; and it was he that had the great organ brought from Holland, and built up in the hall, where it stood now. He taught the old lord to play on it; but many and many a time, when Lord Furnivall was thinking of nothing but his fine organ, and his finer music, the dark foreigner was walking abroad in the woods, with one of the young ladies: now Miss Maude, and then Miss Grace.

Miss Maude won the day and carried off the prize, such as it was; and he and she were married, all unknown to any one; and, before he made his next yearly visit, she had been confined of a little girl at a farm-house on the Moors, while her father and Miss Grace thought she was away at Doncaster Races. But though she was a wife and a mother, she was not a bit softened, but as haughty and as passionate as

ever; and perhaps more so, for she was jealous of Miss Grace, to whom her foreign husband paid a deal of court—by way of blinding her—as he told his wife. But Miss Grace triumphed over Miss Maude, and Miss Maude grew fiercer and fiercer, both with her husband and with her sister; and the former—who could easily shake off what was disagreeable, and hide himself in foreign countries—went away a month before his usual time that summer, and half-threatened that he would never come back again. Meanwhile, the little girl was left at the farm-house, and her mother used to have her horse saddled and gallop wildly over the hills to see her once every week, at the very least; for where she loved she loved, and where she hated she hated. And the old lord went on playing—playing on his organ; and the servants thought the sweet music he made had soothed down his awful temper, of which (Dorothy said) some terrible tales could be told. He grew infirm too, and had to walk with a crutch; and his son—that was the present Lord Furnivall's father—was with the army in America, and the other son at sea; so Miss Maude had it pretty much her own way, and she and Miss Grace grew colder and bitterer to each other every day; till at last they hardly ever spoke, except when the old lord was by. The foreign musician came again the next summer, but it was for the last time; for they led him such a life with their jealousy and their passions, that he grew weary, and went away, and never was heard of again. And Miss Maude, who had always meant to have her marriage acknowledged when her father should be dead, was left now a deserted wife, whom nobody knew to have been married, with a child that she dared not own, although she loved it to distraction; living with a father whom she feared, and a sister whom she hated. When the next summer passed over, and the dark foreigner never came, both Miss Maude and Miss Grace grew gloomy and sad; they had a haggard look about them, though they looked handsome as ever. But, by-and-by, Miss Maude brightened; for her father grew more and more infirm, and more than ever carried away by his music; and

she and Miss Grace lived almost entirely apart, having separate rooms, the one on the west side, Miss Maude on the east—those very rooms which were now shut up. So she thought she might have her little girl with her, and no one need ever know except those who dared not speak about it, and were bound to believe that it was, as she said, a cottager's child she had taken a fancy to. All this, Dorothy said, was pretty well known; but what came afterwards no one knew, except Miss Grace and Mrs. Stark, who was even then her maid, and much more of a friend to her than ever her sister had been. But the servants supposed, from words that were dropped, that Miss Maude had triumphed over Miss Grace, and told her that all the time the dark foreigner had been mocking her with pretended love—he was her own husband. The colour left Miss Grace's cheek and lips that very day for ever, and she was heard to say many a time that sooner or later she would have her revenge; and Mrs. Stark was for ever spying about the east rooms.

One fearful night, just after the New Year had come in, when the snow was lying thick and deep; and the flakes were still falling—fast enough to blind any one who might be out and abroad—there was a great and violent noise heard, and the old lord's voice above all, cursing and swearing awfully, and the cries of a little child, and the proud defiance of a fierce woman, and the sound of a blow, and a dead stillness, and moans and wailings, dying away on the hill-side! Then the old lord summoned all his servants, and told them, with terrible oaths, and words more terrible, that his daughter had disgraced herself, and that he had turned her out of doors—her, and her child—and that if ever they gave her help, or food, or shelter, he prayed that they might never enter heaven. And, all the while, Miss Grace stood by him, white and still as any stone; and, when he had ended, she heaved a great sigh, as much as to say her work was done, and her end was accomplished. But the old lord never touched his organ again, and died within the year; and no wonder! for, on the morrow of that wild and fearful

night, the shepherds, coming down the Fell side, found Miss Maude sitting, all crazy and smiling, under the holly-trees, nursing a dead child, with a terrible mark on its right shoulder. "But that was not what killed it," said Dorothy: "it was the frost and the cold. Every wild creature was in its hole, and every beast in its fold, while the child and its mother were turned out to wander on the Fells! And now you know all! and I wonder if you are less frightened now?"

I was more frightened than ever; but I said I was not. I wished Miss Rosamond and myself well out of that dreadful house for ever; but I would not leave her, and I dared not take her away. But oh, how I watched her, and guarded her! We bolted the doors, and shut the window-shutters fast, an hour or more before dark, rather than leave them open five minutes too late. But my little lady still heard the weird child crying and mourning; and not all we could do or say could keep her from wanting to go to her, and let her in from the cruel wind and snow. All this time I kept away from Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark, as much as ever I could; for I feared them—I knew no good could be about them, with their grey, hard faces, and their dreamy eyes, looking back into the ghastly years that were gone. But, even in my fear, I had a kind of pity for Miss Furnivall, at least. Those gone down to the pit can hardly have a more hopeless look than that which was ever on her face. At last I even got so sorry for her—who never said a word but what was quite forced from her—that I prayed for her; and I taught Miss Rosamond to pray for one who had done a deadly sin; but often, when she came to those words, she would listen, and start up from her knees, and say, "I hear my little girl plaining and crying, very sad,—oh, let her in, or she will die!"

One night—just after New Year's Day had come at last, and the long winter had taken a turn, as I hoped—I heard the west drawing-room bell ring three times, which was the signal for me. I would not leave Miss Rosamond alone, for

all she was asleep—for the old lord had been playing wilder than ever—and I feared lest my darling should waken to hear the spectre child; see her I knew she could not. I had fastened the windows too well for that. So I took her out of her bed, and wrapped her up in such outer clothes as were most handy, and carried her down to the drawing-room, where the old ladies sat at their tapestry-work as usual. They looked up when I came in, and Mrs. Stark asked, quite astounded, "Why did I bring Miss Rosamond there, out of her warm bed?" I had begun to whisper, "Because I was afraid of her being tempted out while I was away, by the wild child in the snow," when she stopped me short (with a glance at Miss Furnivall), and said Miss Furnivall wanted me to undo some work she had done wrong, and which neither of them could see to unpick. So I laid my pretty dear on the sofa, and sat down on a stool by them, and hardened my heart against them, as I heard the wind rising and howling.

Miss Rosamond slept on sound, for all the wind blew so; and Miss Furnivall said never a word, nor looked round when the gusts shook the windows. All at once she started up to her full height, and put up one hand, as if to bid us listen.

"I hear voices!" said she. "I hear terrible screams—I hear my father's voice!"

Just at that moment my darling wakened with a sudden start: "My little girl is crying, oh, how she is crying!" and she tried to get up and go to her, but she got her feet entangled in the blanket, and I caught her up; for my flesh had begun to creep at these noises, which they heard while we could catch no sound. In a minute or two the noises came, and gathered fast, and filled our ears; we, too, heard voices and screams, and no longer heard the winter's wind that raged abroad. Mrs. Stark looked at me, and I at her, but we dared not speak. Suddenly Miss Furnivall went towards the door, out into the ante-room, through the west lobby, and opened the door into the great hall. Mrs. Stark

followed, and I durst not be left, though my heart almost stopped beating for fear. I wrapped my darling tight in my arms, and went out with them. In the hall the screams were louder than ever; they seemed to come from the east wing—nearer and nearer—close on the other side of the locked-up doors—close behind them. Then I noticed that the great bronze chandelier seemed all alight, though the hall was dim, and that a fire was blazing in the vast hearth-place, though it gave no heat; and I shuddered up with terror, and folded my darling closer to me. But as I did so the east door shook, and she, suddenly struggling to get free from me, cried, "Hester! I must go. My little girl is there! I hear her; she is coming! Hester, I must go!"

I held her tight with all my strength; with a set will, I held her. If I had died, my hands would have grasped her still, I was so resolved in my mind. Miss Furnivall stood listening, and paid no regard to my darling, who had got down to the ground, and whom I, upon my knees now, was holding with both my arms clasped round her neck; she still striving and crying to get free.

All at once, the east door gave way with a thundering crash, as if torn open in a violent passion, and there came into that broad and mysterious light, the figure of a tall old man, with grey hair and gleaming eyes. He drove before him, with many a relentless gesture of abhorrence, a stern and beautiful woman, with a little child clinging to her dress.

"O Hester! Hester!" cried Miss Rosamond; "it's the lady! the lady below the holly-trees; and my little girl is with her. Hester! Hester! let me go to her; they are drawing me to them. I feel them—I feel them. I must go!"

Again she was almost convulsed by her efforts to get away; but I held her tighter and tighter, till I feared I should do her a hurt; but rather that than let her go towards those terrible phantoms. They passed along towards the great hall-door, where the winds howled and ravened for

their prey; but before they reached that, the lady turned; and I could see that she defied the old man with a fierce and proud defiance; but then she quailed—and then she threw up her arms wildly and piteously to save her child—her little child—from a blow from his uplifted crutch.

And Miss Rosamond was torn as by a power stronger than mine, and writhed in my arms, and sobbed (for by this time the poor darling was growing faint).

"They want me to go with them on to the Fells—they are drawing me to them. Oh, my little girl! I would come, but cruel, wicked Hester holds me very tight." But when she saw the uplifted crutch, she swooned away, and I thanked God for it. Just at this moment—when the tall old man, his hair streaming as in the blast of a furnace, was going to strike the little shrinking child—Miss Furnivall, the old woman by my side, cried out, "O father! father! spare the little innocent child!" But just then I saw—we all saw—another phantom shape itself, and grow clear out of the blue and misty light that filled the hall; we had not seen her till now, for it was another lady who stood by the old man, with a look of relentless hate and triumphant scorn. That figure was very beautiful to look upon, with a soft, white hat drawn down over the proud brows, and a red and curling lip. It was dressed in an open robe of blue satin. I had seen that figure before. It was the likeness of Miss Furnivall in her youth; and the terrible phantoms moved on, regardless of old Miss Furnivall's wild entreaty,—and the uplifted crutch fell on the right shoulder of the little child, and the younger sister looked on, stony, and deadly serene. But at that moment, the dim lights, and the fire that gave no heat, went out of themselves, and Miss Furnivall lay at our feet stricken down by the palsy—death-stricken.

Yes! she was carried to her bed that night never to rise again. She lay with her face to the wall, muttering low, but muttering always: "Alas! alas! what is done in youth can never be undone in age! What is done in youth can never be undone in age!"

MORTON HALL

CHAPTER I

Our old Hall is to be pulled down, and they are going to build streets on the site. I said to my sister, "Ethelinda, if they really pull down Morton Hall it will be a worse piece of work than the Repeal of the Corn Laws." And, after some consideration, she replied, that if she must speak what was on her mind, she would own that she thought the Papists had something to do with it; that they had never forgiven the Morton who had been with Lord Monteagle when he discovered the Gunpowder Plot; for we knew that, somewhere in Rome, there was a book kept, and which had been kept for generations, giving an account of the secret private history of every English family of note, and registering the names of those to whom the Papists owed either grudges or gratitude.

We were silent for some time; but I am sure the same thought was in both our minds; our ancestor, a Sidebotham, had been a follower of the Morton of that day; it had always been said in the family that he had been with his master when he went with the Lord Monteagle, and found Guy Fawkes and his dark lantern under the Parliament House; and the question flashed across our minds, were the Sidebothams marked with a black mark in that terrible mysterious book which was kept under lock and key by the Pope and the Cardinals in Rome? It was terrible, yet, somehow, rather pleasant to think of. So many of the misfortunes which had happened to us through life, and which we had called "mysterious dispensations," but which some of our

neighbours had attributed to our want of prudence and foresight, were accounted for at once, if we were objects of the deadly hatred of such a powerful order as the Jesuits, of whom we had lived in dread ever since we had read the "Female Jesuit." Whether this last idea suggested what my sister said next I can't tell; we did know the Female Jesuit's second cousin, so might be said to have literary connections, and from that the startling thought might spring up in my sister's mind, for, said she, "Biddy" (my name is Bridget, and no one but my sister calls me Biddy), "suppose you write some account of Morton Hall; we have known much in our time of the Mortons, and it will be a shame if they pass away completely from men's memories while we can speak or write." I was pleased with the notion, I confess; but I felt ashamed to agree to it all at once, though even, as I objected for modesty's sake, it came into my mind how much I had heard of the old place in its former days, and how it was, perhaps, all I could now do for the Mortons, under whom our ancestors had lived as tenants for more than three hundred years. So at last I agreed; and, for fear of mistakes, I showed it to Mr. Swinton, our young curate, who has put it quite in order for me.

Morton Hall is situated about five miles from the centre of Drumble. It stands on the outskirts of a village, which, when the Hall was built, was probably as large as Drumble in those days; and even I can remember when there was a long piece of rather lonely road, with high hedges on either side, between Morton village and Drumble. Now, it is all street, and Morton seems but a suburb of the great town near. Our farm stood where Liverpool Street runs now; and people used to come snipe-shooting just where the Baptist chapel is built. Our farm must have been older than the Hall, for we had a date of 1460 on one of the cross-beams. My father was rather proud of this advantage, for the Hall had no date older than 1554; and I remember his affronting Mrs. Dawson, the housekeeper, by dwelling too much on this circumstance one evening when she came to

drink tea with my mother, when Ethelinda and I were mere children. But my mother, seeing that Mrs. Dawson would never allow that any house in the parish could be older than the Hall, and that she was getting very warm, and almost insinuating that the Sidebothams had forged the date to disparage the squire's family, and set themselves up as having the older blood, asked Mrs. Dawson to tell us the story of old Sir John Morton before we went to bed. I slily reminded my father that Jack, our man, was not always so careful as might be in housing the Alderney in good time in the autumn evenings. So he started up, and went off to see after Jack; and Mrs. Dawson and we drew nearer the fire to hear the story about Sir John.

Sir John Morton had lived some time about the Restoration. The Mortons had taken the right side; so when Oliver Cromwell came into power, he gave away their lands to one of his Puritan followers—a man who had been but a praying, canting, Scotch pedlar till the war broke out; and Sir John had to go and live with his royal master at Bruges. The upstart's name was Carr, who came to live at Morton Hall; and, I'm proud to say, we—I mean our ancestors—led him a pretty life. He had hard work to get any rent at all from the tenantry, who knew their duty better than to pay it to a Roundhead. If he took the law to them, the law officers fared so badly, that they were shy of coming out to Morton—all along that lonely road I told you of—again. Strange noises were heard about the Hall, which got the credit of being haunted; but, as those noises were never heard before or since that Richard Carr lived there, I leave you to guess if the evil spirits did not know well over whom they had power—over schismatic rebels, and no one else. They durst not trouble the Mortons, who were true and loyal, and were faithful followers of King Charles in word and deed. At last old Oliver died; and folks did say that, on that wild and stormy night, his voice was heard high up in the air, where you hear the flocks of wild geese skirl, crying out for his true follower Richard Carr to accompany

him in the terrible chase the fiends were giving him before carrying him down to hell. Anyway, Richard Carr died within a week—summoned by the dead or not, he went his way down to his master, and his master's master.

Then his daughter Alice came into possession. Her mother was somehow related to General Monk, who was beginning to come into power about that time. So when Charles the Second came back to his throne, and many of the sneaking Puritans had to quit their ill-gotten land, and turn to the right-about, Alice Carr was still left at Morton Hall to queen it there. She was taller than most women, and a great beauty, I have heard. But, for all her beauty, she was a stern, hard woman. The tenants had known her to be hard in her father's lifetime, but now that she was the owner, and had the power, she was worse than ever. She hated the Stuarts worse than ever her father had done; had calves' head for dinner every thirtieth of January; and when the first twenty-ninth of May came round, and every mother's son in the village gilded his oak-leaves, and wore them in his hat, she closed the windows of the great Hall with her own hands, and sate throughout the day in darkness and mourning. People did not like to go against her by force, because she was a young and beautiful woman. It was said the King got her cousin, the Duke of Albemarle, to ask her to court, just as courteously as if she had been the Queen of Sheba, and King Charles Solomon praying her to visit him in Jerusalem. But she would not go; not she! She lived a very lonely life, for now the King had got his own again, no servant but her nurse would stay with her in the Hall; and none of the tenants would pay her any money, for all that her father had purchased the lands from the Parliament, and paid the price down in good red gold.

All this time, Sir John was somewhere in the Virginian plantations; and the ships sailed thence only twice a year; but his royal master had sent for him home; and home he came, that second summer after the Restoration. No one knew if Mistress Alice had heard of his landing in England

or not; all the villagers and tenantry knew, and were not surprised, and turned out in their best dresses, and with great branches of oak, to welcome him as he rode into the village one July morning, with many gay-looking gentlemen by his side, laughing, and talking, and making merry, and speaking gaily and pleasantly to the village people. They came in on the opposite side to the Drumble Road; indeed Drumble was nothing of a place then, as I have told you. Between the last cottage in the village and the gates to the old Hall, there was a shady part of the road, where the branches nearly met overhead, and made a green gloom. If you'll notice, when many people are talking merrily out of doors in sunlight, they will stop talking for an instant, when they come into the cool green shade, and either be silent for some little time, or else speak graver, and slower, and softer. And so old people say those gay gentlemen did; for several people followed to see Alice Carr's pride taken down. They used to tell how the cavaliers had to bow their plumed hats in passing under the unlopped and drooping boughs. I fancy Sir John expected that the lady would have rallied her friends, and got ready for a sort of battle to defend the entrance to the house; but she had no friends. She had no nearer relations than the Duke of Albemarle, and he was mad with her for having refused to come to court, and so save her estate, according to his advice.

Well, Sir John rode on in silence; the tramp of the many horses' feet, and the clumping sound of the clogs of the village people were all that was heard. Heavy as the great gate was, they swung it wide on its hinges, and up they rode to the Hall steps, where the lady stood, in her close, plain, Puritan dress, her cheeks one crimson flush, her great eyes flashing fire, and no one behind her, or with her, or near her, or to be seen, but the old trembling nurse, catching at her gown in pleading terror. Sir John was taken aback; he could not go out with swords and warlike weapons against a woman; his very preparations for forcing an entrance made him ridiculous in his own eyes, and, he well knew, in

the eyes of his gay, scornful comrades too; so he turned him round about, and bade them stay where they were, while he rode close to the steps, and spoke to the young lady; and there they saw him, hat in hand, speaking to her; and she, lofty and unmoved, holding her own as if she had been a sovereign queen with an army at her back. What they said, no one heard; but he rode back, very grave and much changed in his look, though his grey eye showed more hawk-like than ever, as if seeing the way to his end, though as yet afar off. He was not one to be jested with before his face; so, when he professed to have changed his mind, and not to wish to disturb so fair a lady in possession, he and his cavaliers rode back to the village inn, and roystered there all day, and feasted the tenantry, cutting down the branches that had incommoded them in their morning's ride, to make a bonfire of on the village green, in which they burnt a figure, which some called Old Noll, and others Richard Carr: and it might do for either, folks said, for unless they had given it the name of a man, most people would have taken it for a forked log of wood.

But the lady's nurse told the villagers afterwards that Mistress Alice went in from the sunny Hall steps into the chill house shadow, and sate her down and wept as her poor faithful servant had never seen her do before, and could not have imagined her proud young lady ever doing. All through that summer's day she cried; and if for very weariness she ceased for a time, and only sighed as if her heart was breaking, they heard through the upper windows—which were open because of the heat—the village bells ringing merrily through the trees, and bursts of choruses to gay cavalier songs, all in favour of the Stuarts. All the young lady said was once or twice, "O God! I am very friendless!"—and the old nurse knew it was true, and could not contradict her; and always thought, as she said long after, that such weary weeping showed there was some great sorrow at hand.

I suppose it was the dreariest sorrow that ever a proud woman had; but it came in the shape of a gay wedding.

How, the village never knew. The gay gentlemen rode away from Morton the next day as lightly and carelessly as if they had attained their end, and Sir John had taken possession; and, by-and-by, the nurse came timorously out to market in the village, and Mistress Alice was met in the wood walks just as grand and as proud as ever in her ways, only a little more pale, and a little more sad. The truth was, as I have been told, that she and Sir John had each taken a fancy to each other in that parley they held on the Hall steps; she, in the deep, wild way in which she took the impressions of her whole life, deep down, as if they were burnt in. Sir John was a gallant-looking man, and had a kind of foreign grace and courtliness about him. The way he fancied her was very different—a man's way, they tell me. She was a beautiful woman to be tamed, and made to come to his beck and call; and perhaps he read in her softening eyes that she might be won, and so all legal troubles about the possession of the estate come to an end in an easy, pleasant manner. He came to stay with friends in the neighbourhood; he was met in her favourite walks, with his plumed hat in his hand, pleading with her, and she looking softer and far more lovely than ever; and lastly, the tenants were told of the marriage then nigh at hand.

After they were wedded, he stayed for a time with her at the Hall, and then off back to court. They do say that her obstinate refusal to go with him to London was the cause of their first quarrel; but such fierce, strong wills would quarrel the first day of their wedded life. She said that the court was no place for an honest woman; but surely Sir John knew best, and she might have trusted him to take care of her. However, he left her all alone; and at first she cried most bitterly, and then she took to her old pride, and was more haughty and gloomy than ever. By-and-by she found out hidden conventicles; and, as Sir John never stinted her of money, she gathered the remnants of the old Puritan party about her, and tried to comfort herself with long prayers, snuffled through the nose, for the absence of her husband;

but it was of no use. Treat her as he would, she loved him still with a terrible love. Once, they say, she put on her waiting-maid's dress, and stole up to London to find out what kept him there; and something she saw or heard changed her altogether, for she came back as if her heart was broken. They say that the only person she loved with all the wild strength of her heart, had proved false to her; and if so, what wonder! At the best of times she was but a gloomy creature, and it was a great honour for her father's daughter to be wedded to a Morton. She should not have expected too much.

After her despondency came her religion. Every old Puritan preacher in the country was welcome at Morton Hall. Surely that was enough to disgust Sir John. The Mortons had never cared to have much religion, but what they had, had been good of its kind hitherto. So, when Sir John came down, wanting a gay greeting and a tender show of love, his lady exhorted him, and prayed over him, and quoted the last Puritan text she had heard at him; and he swore at her, and at her preachers; and made a deadly oath that none of them should find harbour or welcome in any house of his. She looked scornfully back at him, and said she had yet to learn in what county of England the house he spoke of was to be found; but in the house her father purchased, and she inherited, all who preached the gospel should be welcome, let kings make what laws, and kings' minions swear what oaths they would. He said nothing to this—the worst sign for her; but he set his teeth at her; and in an hour's time he rode away back to the French witch that had beguiled him.

Before he went away from Morton he set his spies. He longed to catch his wife in his fierce clutch, and punish her for defying him. She had made him hate her with her Puritanical ways. He counted the days till the messenger came, splashed up to the top of his deep leather boots, to say that my lady had invited the canting Puritan preachers of the neighbourhood to a prayer-meeting, and a dinner, and

a night's rest at her house. Sir John smiled as he gave the messenger five gold pieces for his pains; and straight took post-horses, and rode long days till he got to Morton; and only just in time, for it was the very day of the prayer-meeting. Dinners were then at one o'clock in the country. The great people in London might keep late hours, and dine at three in the afternoon or so; but the Mortons, they always clung to the good old ways; and, as the church bells were ringing twelve when Sir John came riding into the village, he knew he might slacken bridle; and, casting one glance at the smoke which came hurrying up as if from a newly-mended fire, just behind the wood, where he knew the Hall kitchen chimney stood, Sir John stopped at the smithy, and pretended to question the smith about his horse's shoes; but he took little heed of the answers, being more occupied by an old serving-man from the Hall, who had been loitering about the smithy half the morning, as folk thought afterwards, to keep some appointment with Sir John. When their talk was ended, Sir John lifted himself straight in his saddle, cleared his throat, and spoke out aloud —

"I grieve to hear your lady is so ill." The smith wondered at this, for all the village knew of the coming feast at the Hall; the spring-chickens had been bought up, and the cade lambs killed; for the preachers in those days, if they fasted they fasted, if they fought they fought, if they prayed they prayed, sometimes for three hours at a standing; and if they feasted they feasted, and knew what good eating was, believe me.

"My lady ill?" said the smith, as if he doubted the old prim serving-man's word. And the latter would have chopped in with an angry asseveration (he had been at Worcester, and fought on the right side), but Sir John cut him short.

"My lady is very ill, good Master Fox. It touches her here," continued he, pointing to his head. "I am come down to take her to London, where the King's own physician shall prescribe for her." And he rode slowly up to the Hall.

The lady was as well as ever she had been in her life,

and happier than she had often been; for in a few minutes some of those whom she esteemed so highly would be about her, some of those who had known and valued her father — her dead father, to whom her sorrowful heart turned in its woe, as the only true lover and friend she had ever had on earth. Many of the preachers would have ridden far—was all in order in their rooms, and on the table in the great dining-parlour? She had got into restless hurried ways of late. She went round below, and then she mounted the great oak staircase to see if the tower bed-chamber was all in order for old Master Hilton, the oldest among the preachers. Meanwhile, the maidens below were carrying in mighty cold rounds of spiced beef, quarters of lamb, chicken pies, and all such provisions, when, suddenly, they knew not how, they found themselves each seized by strong arms, their aprons thrown over their heads, after the manner of a gag, and themselves borne out of the house on to the poultry-green behind, where, with threats of what worse might befall them, they were sent with many a shameful word (Sir John could not always command his men, many of whom had been soldiers in the French wars) back into the village. They scudded away like frightened hares. My lady was strewing the white-headed preacher's room with the last year's lavender, and stirring up the sweet-pot on the dressing-table, when she heard a step on the echoing stairs. It was no measured tread of any Puritan; it was the clang of a man of war coming nearer and nearer, with loud rapid strides. She knew the step; her heart stopped beating, not for fear, but because she loved Sir John even yet; and she took a step forward to meet him, and then stood still and trembled, for the flattering false thought came before her that he might have come yet in some quick impulse of reviving love, and that his hasty step might be prompted by the passionate tenderness of a husband. But when he reached the door, she looked as calm and indifferent as ever.

"My lady," said he, "you are gathering your friends to some feast. May I know who are thus invited to revel in

my house? Some graceless fellows, I see, from the store of meat and drink below—wine-bibbers and drunkards, I fear."

But, by the working glance of his eye, she saw that he knew all; and she spoke with a cold distinctness.

"Master Ephraim Dixon, Master Zerubbabel Hopkins, Master Help-me-or-I-perish Perkins, and some other godly ministers, come to spend the afternoon in my house."

He went to her, and in his rage he struck her. She put up no arm to save herself, but reddened a little with the pain, and then drawing her neckerchief on one side, she looked at the crimson mark on her white neck.

"It serves me right," she said. "I wedded one of my father's enemies; one of those who would have hunted the old man to death. I gave my father's enemy house and lands, when he came as a beggar to my door; I followed my wicked, wayward heart in this, instead of minding my dying father's words. Strike again, and avenge him yet more!"

But he would not, because she bade him. He unloosed his sash, and bound her arms tight—tight together, and she never struggled or spoke. Then pushing her so that she was obliged to sit down on the bed side—

"Sit there," he said, "and hear how I will welcome the old hypocrites you have dared to ask to my house—my house and my ancestors' house long before your father—a canting pedlar—hawked his goods about, and cheated honest men."

And, opening the chamber window right above those Hall steps where she had awaited him in her maiden beauty scarce three short years ago, he greeted the company of preachers as they rode up to the Hall with such terrible, hideous language (my lady had provoked him past all bearing, you see), that the old men turned round aghast, and made the best of their way back to their own places.

Meanwhile, Sir John's serving-men below had obeyed their master's orders. They had gone through the house, closing every window, every shutter, and every door, but leaving all else just as it was—the cold meats on the table, the hot meats on the spit, the silver flagons on the side-board,

all just as if it were ready for a feast; and then Sir John's head-servant, he that I spoke of before, came up and told his master all was ready.

"Is the horse and the pillion all ready? Then you and I must be my lady's tire-women;" and as it seemed to her in mockery, but in reality with a deep purpose, they dressed the helpless woman in her riding things all awry, and strange and disorderly. Sir John carried her downstairs; and he and his man bound her on the pillion; and Sir John mounted before. The man shut and locked the great house-door, and the echoes of the clang went through the empty Hall with an ominous sound. "Throw the key," said Sir John, "deep into the mere yonder. My lady may go seek it if she lists, when next I set her arms at liberty. Till then I know whose house Morton Hall shall be called."

"Sir John! it shall be called the Devil's House, and you shall be his steward."

But the poor lady had better have held her tongue; for Sir John only laughed, and told her to rave on. As he passed through the village, with his serving-men riding behind, the tenantry came out and stood at their doors, and pitied him for having a mad wife, and praised him for his care of her, and of the chance he gave her of amendment by taking her up to be seen by the King's physician. But, somehow, the Hall got an ugly name; the roast and boiled meats, the ducks, the chickens had time to drop into dust, before any human being now dared to enter in; or, indeed, had any right to enter in, for Sir John never came back to Morton; and as for my lady, some said she was dead, and some said she was mad, and shut up in London, and some said Sir John had taken her to a convent abroad.

"And what did become of her?" asked we, creeping up to Mrs. Dawson.

"Nay, how should I know?"

"But what do you think?" we asked pertinaciously.

"I cannot tell. I have heard that after Sir John was killed at the battle of the Boyne she got loose, and came

wandering back to Morton, to her old nurse's house; but, indeed, she was mad then, out and out, and I've no doubt Sir John had seen it coming on. She used to have visions and dream dreams; and some thought her a prophetess, and some thought her fairly crazy. What she said about the Mortons was awful. She doomed them to die out of the land, and their house to be razed to the ground, while pedlars and huxters, such as her own people, her father, had been, should dwell where the knightly Mortons had once lived. One winter's night she strayed away, and the next morning they found the poor crazy woman frozen to death in Drumble Meeting-house yard; and the Mr. Morton who had succeeded to Sir John had her decently buried where she was found, by the side of her father's grave."

We were silent for a time. "And when was the old Hall opened, Mrs. Dawson, please?"

"Oh! when the Mr. Morton, our squire Morton's grandfather, came into possession. He was a distant cousin of Sir John, a much quieter kind of man. He had all the old rooms opened wide, and aired, and fumigated; and the strange fragments of musty food were collected and burnt in the yard; but somehow that old dining-parlour had always a charnel-house smell, and no one ever liked making merry in it—thinking of the grey old preachers, whose ghosts might be even then scenting the meats afar off, and trooping unbidden to a feast, that was not that of which they were baulked. I was glad for one when the squire's father built another dining-room; and no servant in the house will go an errand into the old dining-parlour after dark, I can assure ye."

"I wonder if the way the last Mr. Morton had to sell his land to the people at Drumble had anything to do with old Lady Morton's prophecy," said my mother musingly.

"Not at all," said Mrs. Dawson sharply. "My lady was crazy, and her words not to be minded. I should like to see the cotton-spinners of Drumble offer to purchase land from the squire. Besides, there's a strict entail now. They can't

purchase the land if they would. A set of trading pedlars, indeed!"

I remember Ethelinda and I looked at each other at this word "pedlars;" which was the very word she had put into Sir John's mouth when taunting his wife with her father's low birth and calling. We thought, "We shall see."

Alas! we have seen.

Soon after that evening our good old friend Mrs. Dawson died. I remember it well, because Ethelinda and I were put into mourning for the first time in our lives. A dear little brother of ours had died only the year before, and then my father and mother had decided that we were too young; that there was no necessity for their incurring the expense of black frocks. We mourned for the little delicate darling in our hearts, I know; and to this day I often wonder what it would have been to have had a brother. But when Mrs. Dawson died it became a sort of duty we owed to the squire's family to go into black, and very proud and pleased Ethelinda and I were with our new frocks. I remember dreaming Mrs. Dawson was alive again, and crying, because I thought my new frock would be taken away from me. But all this has nothing to do with Morton Hall.

When I first became aware of the greatness of the squire's station in life, his family consisted of himself, his wife (a frail, delicate lady), his only son, "little master," as Mrs. Dawson was allowed to call him, "the young squire," as we in the village always termed him. His name was John Marmaduke. He was always called John; and after Mrs. Dawson's story of the old Sir John, I used to wish he might not bear that ill-omened name. He used to ride through the village in his bright scarlet coat, his long fair curling hair falling over his lace collar, and his broad black hat and feather shading his merry blue eyes. Ethelinda and I thought then, and I always shall think, there never was such a boy. He had a fine high spirit, too, of his own, and once horsewhipped a groom twice as big as himself who had thwarted him. To see him and Miss Phillis go tearing

through the village on their pretty Arabian horses, laughing as they met the west wind, and their long golden curls flying behind them, you would have thought them brother and sister, rather than nephew and aunt; for Miss Phillis was the squire's sister, much younger than himself; indeed, at the time I speak of, I don't think she could have been above seventeen, and the young squire, her nephew, was nearly ten. I remember Mrs. Dawson sending for my mother and me up to the Hall, that we might see Miss Phillis dressed ready to go with her brother to a ball given at some great lord's house to Prince William of Gloucester, nephew to good old George the Third.

When Mrs. Elizabeth, Mrs. Morton's maid, saw us at tea in Mrs. Dawson's room, she asked Ethelinda and me if we would not like to come into Miss Phillis's dressing-room, and watch her dress; and then she said, if we would promise to keep from touching anything, she would make interest for us to go. We would have promised to stand on our heads, and would have tried to do so too, to earn such a privilege. So in we went, and stood together, hand-in-hand, up in a corner out of the way, feeling very red, and shy, and hot, till Miss Phillis put us at our ease by playing all manner of comical tricks, just to make us laugh, which at last we did outright, in spite of all our endeavours to be grave, lest Mrs. Elizabeth should complain of us to my mother. I recollect the scent of the *maréchale* powder with which Miss Phillis's hair was just sprinkled; and how she shook her head, like a young colt, to work the hair loose which Mrs. Elizabeth was straining up over a cushion. Then Mrs. Elizabeth would try a little of Mrs. Morton's rouge; and Miss Phillis would wash it off with a wet towel, saying that she liked her own paleness better than any performer's colour; and when Mrs. Elizabeth wanted just to touch her cheeks once more, she hid herself behind the great arm-chair, peeping out, with her sweet, merry face, first at one side and then at another, till we all heard the squire's voice at the door, asking her, if she was dressed, to come and show herself to madam, her sister-

in-law; for, as I said, Mrs. Morton was a great invalid, and unable to go out to any grand parties like this. We were all silent in an instant; and even Mrs. Elizabeth thought no more of the rouge, but how to get Miss Phillis's beautiful blue dress on quickly enough. She had cherry-coloured knots in her hair, and her breast-knots were of the same ribbon. Her gown was open in front, to a quilted white silk skirt. We felt very shy of her as she stood there fully dressed—she looked so much grander than anything we had ever seen; and it was like a relief when Mrs. Elizabeth told us to go down to Mrs. Dawson's parlour, where my mother was sitting all this time.

Just as we were telling how merry and comical Miss Phillis had been, in came a footman. "Mrs. Dawson," said he, "the squire bids me ask you to go with Mrs. Sidebotham into the west parlour, to have a look at Miss Morton before she goes." We went, too, clinging to my mother. Miss Phillis looked rather shy as we came in, and stood just by the door. I think we all must have shown her that we had never seen anything so beautiful as she was in our lives before; for she went very scarlet at our fixed gaze of admiration, and, to relieve herself, she began to play all manner of antics—whirling round, and making cheeses with her rich silk petticoat; unfurling a fan (a present from madam, to complete her dress), and peeping first on one side and then on the other, just as she had done upstairs; and then catching hold of her nephew, and insisting that he should dance a minuet with her until the carriage came; which proposal made him very angry, as it was an insult to his manhood (at nine years old) to suppose he could dance. "It was all very well for girls to make fools of themselves," he said, "but it did not do for men." And Ethelinda and I thought we had never heard so fine a speech before. But the carriage came before we had half feasted our eyes enough; and the squire came from his wife's room to order the little master to bed, and hand his sister to the carriage.

I remember a good deal of talk about royal dukes and

unequal marriages that night. I believe Miss Phillis did dance with Prince William; and I have often heard that she bore away the bell at the ball, and that no one came near her for beauty and pretty, merry ways. In a day or two after I saw her scampering through the village, looking just as she did before she had danced with a royal duke. We all thought she would marry some one great, and used to look out for the lord who was to take her away. But poor madam died, and there was no one but Miss Phillis to comfort her brother, for the young squire was gone away to some great school down south; and Miss Phillis grew grave, and reined in her pony to keep by the squire's side, when he rode out on his steady old mare in his lazy, careless way.

We did not hear so much of the doings at the Hall now Mrs. Dawson was dead; so I cannot tell how it was; but, by-and-by, there was a talk of bills that were once paid weekly, being now allowed to run to quarter-day; and then, instead of being settled every quarter-day, they were put off to Christmas; and many said they had hard enough work to get their money then. A buzz went through the village that the young squire played high at college, and that he made away with more money than his father could afford. But when he came down to Morton, he was as handsome as ever; and I, for one, never believed evil of him; though I'll allow others might cheat him, and he never suspect it. His aunt was as fond of him as ever; and he of her. Many is the time I have seen them out walking together, sometimes sad enough, sometimes merry as ever. By-and-by, my father heard of sales of small pieces of land, not included in the entail; and, at last, things got so bad, that the very crops were sold yet green upon the ground, for any price folks would give, so that there was but ready money paid. The squire at length gave way entirely, and never left the house; and the young master in London; and poor Miss Phillis used to go about trying to see after the workmen and labourers, and save what she could. By this time she would be above thirty; Ethelinda and I were nineteen and twenty-

one when my mother died, and that was some years before this. Well, at last the squire died, they do say of a broken heart at his son's extravagance; and, though the lawyers kept it very close, it began to be rumoured that Miss Phillis's fortune had gone too. Any way, the creditors came down on the estate like wolves. It was entailed, and it could not be sold; but they put it into the hands of a lawyer, who was to get what he could out of it, and have no pity for the poor young squire, who had not a roof for his head. Miss Phillis went to live by herself in a little cottage in the village, at the end of the property, which the lawyer allowed her to have because he could not let it to any one, it was so tumble-down and old. We never knew what she lived on, poor lady; but she said she was well in health, which was all we durst ask about. She came to see my father just before he died, and he seemed made bold with the feeling that he was a dying man; so he asked, what I had longed to know for many a year, where was the young squire? he had never been seen in Morton since his father's funeral. Miss Phillis said he was gone abroad; but in what part he was then she herself hardly knew; only she had a feeling that, sooner or later, he would come back to the old place; where she should strive to keep a home for him whenever he was tired of wandering about, and trying to make his fortune.

"Trying to make his fortune still?" asked my father, his questioning eyes saying more than his words. Miss Phillis shook her head, with a sad meaning in her face; and we understood it all. He was at some French gaming-table, if he was not at an English one.

Miss Phillis was right. It might be a year after my father's death when he came back, looking old and grey and worn. He came to our door just after we had barred it one winter's evening. Ethelinda and I still lived at the farm, trying to keep it up, and make it pay; but it was hard work. We heard a step coming up the straight pebble walk; and then it stopped right at our door, under the very porch, and we heard a man's breathing, quick and short.

"Shall I open the door?" said I.

"No, wait!" said Ethelinda; for we lived alone, and there was no cottage near us. We held our breaths. There came a knock.

"Who's there?" I cried.

"Where does Miss Morton live—Miss Phillis?"

We were not sure if we would answer him; for she, like us, lived alone.

"Who's there?" again said I.

"Your master," he answered, proud and angry. "My name is John Morton. Where does Miss Phillis live?"

We had the door unbarred in a trice, and begged him to come in; to pardon our rudeness. We would have given him of our best, as was his due from us; but he only listened to the directions we gave him to his aunt's, and took no notice of our apologies.

CHAPTER II

Up to this time we had felt it rather impertinent to tell each other of our individual silent wonder as to what Miss Phillis lived on; but I know in our hearts we each thought about it, with a kind of respectful pity for her fallen low estate. Miss Phillis—that we remembered like an angel for beauty, and like a little princess for the imperious sway she exercised, and which was such sweet compulsion that we had all felt proud to be her slaves—Miss Phillis was now a worn, plain woman, in homely dress, tending towards old age; and looking—(at that time I dared not have spoken so insolent a thought, not even to myself)—but she did look as if she had hardly the proper nourishing food she required. One day, I remember Mrs. Jones, the butcher's wife (she was a Drumble person), saying, in her saucy way, that she was

not surprised to see Miss Morton so bloodless and pale, for she only treated herself to a Sunday's dinner of meat, and lived on slop and bread-and-butter all the rest of the week. Ethelinda put on her severe face—a look that I am afraid of to this day—and said, "Mrs. Jones, do you suppose Miss Morton can eat your half-starved meat? You do not know how choice and dainty she is, as becomes one born and bred like her. What was it we had to bring for her only last Saturday from the grand new butcher's in Drumble, Biddy?" —(We took our eggs to market in Drumble every Saturday, for the cotton-spinners would give us a higher price than the Morton people: the more fools they!)

I thought it rather cowardly of Ethelinda to put the story-telling on me; but she always thought a great deal of saving her soul; more than I did, I am afraid, for I made answer, as bold as a lion, "Two sweetbreads, at a shilling apiece; and a fore-quarter of house-lamb, at eighteen-pence a pound." So off went Mrs. Jones, in a huff, saying, "Their meat was good enough for Mrs. Donkin, the great millowner's widow, and might serve a beggarly Morton any day." When we were alone, I said to Ethelinda, "I'm afraid we shall have to pay for our lies at the great day of account"; and Ethelinda answered very sharply—(she's a good sister in the main)—"Speak for yourself, Biddy. I never said a word. I only asked questions. How could I help it if you told lies? I'm sure I wondered at you, how glib you spoke out what was not true." But I knew she was glad I told the lies, in her heart.

After the poor squire came to live with his aunt, Miss Phillis, we ventured to speak a bit to ourselves. We were sure they were pinched. They looked like it. He had a bad, hacking cough at times; though he was so dignified and proud he would never cough when any one was near. I have seen him up before it was day, sweeping the dung off the roads, to try and get enough to manure the little plot of ground behind the cottage, which Miss Phillis had let alone, but which her nephew used to dig in and till; for, said he,

one day, in his grand, slow way, "he was always fond of experiments in agriculture." Ethelinda and I do believe that the two or three score of cabbages he raised were all they had to live on that winter, besides the bit of meal and tea they got at the village shop.

One Friday night I said to Ethelinda, "It is a shame to take these eggs to Drumble to sell, and never to offer one to the squire, on whose lands we were born." She answered, "I have thought so many a time; but how can we do it? I, for one, dare not offer them to the squire; and as for Miss Phillis, it would seem like impertinence." "I'll try at it," said I.

So that night I took some eggs—fresh yellow eggs from our own pheasant hen, the like of which there were not for twenty miles round—and I laid them softly after dusk on one of the little stone seats in the porch of Miss Phillis's cottage. But alas! when we went to the market at Drumble, early the next morning, there were my eggs all shattered and splashed, making an ugly yellow pool in the road just in front of the cottage. I had meant to have followed it up by a chicken or so; but I saw now that it would never do. Miss Phillis came now and then to call on us; she was a little more high and distant than she had been when a girl, and we felt we must keep our place. I suppose we had affronted the young squire, for he never came near our house.

Well, there came a hard winter, and provisions rose; and Ethelinda and I had much ado to make ends meet. If it had not been for my sister's good management, we should have been in debt, I know; but she proposed that we should go without dinner, and only have a breakfast and a tea, to which I agreed, you may be sure.

On baking-day I had made some cakes for tea—potato-cakes, we called them. They had a savoury, hot smell about them; and to tempt Ethelinda, who was not quite well, I cooked a rasher of bacon. Just as we were sitting down, Miss Phillis knocked at our door. We let her in. God only

knows how white and haggard she looked. The heat of our kitchen made her totter, and for a while she could not speak. But all the time she looked at the food on the table as if she feared to shut her eyes lest it should all vanish away. It was an eager stare like that of some animal, poor soul! "If I durst," said Ethelinda, wishing to ask her to share our meal, but being afraid to speak out. I did not speak, but handed her the good, hot buttered cake; on which she seized, and putting it up to her lips as if to taste it, she fell back in her chair, crying.

We had never seen a Morton cry before; and it was something awful. We stood silent and aghast. She recovered herself, but did not taste the food; on the contrary, she covered it up with both her hands, as if afraid of losing it. "If you'll allow me," said she, in a stately kind of way, to make up for our having seen her crying, "I'll take it to my nephew." And she got up to go away; but she could hardly stand for very weakness, and had to sit down again; she smiled at us, and said she was a little dizzy, but it would soon go off; but, as she smiled, the bloodless lips were drawn far back over her teeth, making her face seem somehow like a death's head. "Miss Morton," said I, "do honour us by taking tea with us this once. The squire, your father, once took a luncheon with my father, and we are proud of it to this day." I poured her out some tea, which she drank; the food she shrank away from as if the very sight of it turned her sick again. But when she rose to go, she looked at it with her sad, wolfish eyes, as if she could not leave it; and at last she broke into a loud cry, and said, "Oh, Bridget, we are starving! we are starving for want of food! I can bear it; I don't mind; but he suffers—oh, how he suffers! Let me take him food for this one night."

We could hardly speak; our hearts were in our throats, and the tears ran down our cheeks like rain. We packed up a basket, and carried it to her very door, never venturing to speak a word, for we knew what it must have cost her to say that. When we left her at the cottage, we made her

our usual deep courtesy, but she fell upon our necks, and kissed us. For several nights after she hovered round our house about dusk; but she would never come in again, and face us in candle or fire-light, much less meet us by daylight. We took out food to her as regularly as might be, and gave it to her in silence, and with the deepest courtesies we could make, we felt so honoured. We had many plans now she had permitted us to know of her distress. We hoped she would allow us to go on serving her in some way as became us as Sidebothams. But one night she never came; we stayed out in the cold, bleak wind, looking into the dark for her thin, worn figure; all in vain. Late the next afternoon, the young squire lifted the latch, and stood right in the middle of our house-place. The roof was low overhead, and made lower by the deep beams supporting the floor above; he stooped as he looked at us, and tried to form words, but no sound came out of his lips. I never saw such gaunt woe; no, never! At last he took me by the shoulder, and led me out of the house.

"Come with me!" he said, when we were in the open air, as if that gave him strength to speak audibly. I needed no second word. We entered Miss Phillis's cottage; a liberty I had never taken before. What little furniture was there, it was clear to be seen, were cast-off fragments of the old splendour of Morton Hall. No fire. Grey wood ashes lay on the hearth. An old settee, once white and gold, now doubly shabby in its fall from its former estate. On it lay Miss Phillis, very pale; very still; her eyes shut.

"Tell me!" he gasped. "Is she dead? I think she is asleep; but she looks so strange—as if she might be"——He could not say the awful word again. I stooped, and felt no warmth; only a cold chill atmosphere seemed to surround her.

"She is dead!" I replied at length. "Oh, Miss Phillis Miss Phillis!" and, like a fool, I began to cry. But he sat down without a tear, and looked vacantly at the empty hearth. I dared not cry any more when I saw him so stony

sad. I did not know what to do. I could not leave him; and yet I had no excuse for staying. I went up to Miss Phillis, and softly arranged the grey ragged locks about her face.

"Ay!" said he. "She must be laid out. Who so fit to do it as you and your sister, children of good old Robert Sidebotham?"

"Oh, my master," I said, "this is no fit place for you. Let me fetch my sister to sit up with me all night; and honour us by sleeping at our poor little cottage."

I did not expect he would have done it; but after a few minutes' silence he agreed to my proposal. I hastened home, and told Ethelinda, and both of us crying, we heaped up the fire, and spread the table with food, and made up a bed in one corner of the floor. While I stood ready to go, I saw Ethelinda open the great chest in which we kept our treasures; and out she took a fine Holland shift that had been one of my mother's wedding shifts; and, seeing what she was after, I went upstairs and brought down a piece of rare old lace, a good deal darned, to be sure, but still old Brussels point, bequeathed to me long ago by my godmother, Mrs. Dawson. We huddled these things under our cloaks, locked the door behind us, and set out to do all we could now for poor Miss Phillis. We found the squire sitting just as we left him; I hardly knew if he understood me when I told him how to unlock our door, and gave him the key, though I spoke as distinctly as ever I could for the choking in my throat. At last he rose and went; and Ethelinda and I composed her poor thin limbs to decent rest, and wrapped her in the fine Holland shift; and then I plaited up my lace into a close cap to tie up the wasted features. When all was done we looked upon her from a little distance.

"A Morton to die of hunger!" said Ethelinda solemnly. "We should not have dared to think that such a thing was within the chances of life. Do you remember that evening, when you and I were little children, and she a merry young lady peeping at us from behind her fan?"

We did not cry any more; we felt very still and awe-struck. After a while I said, "I wonder if, after all, the young squire did go to our house. He had a strange look about him. If I dared I would go and see." I opened the door; the night was black as pitch; the air very still. "I'll go," said I; and off I went, not meeting a creature, for it was long past eleven. I reached our house; the window was long and low, and the shutters were old and shrunk. I could peep between them well, and see all that was going on. He was there, sitting over the fire, never shedding a tear; but seeming as if he saw his past life in the embers. The food we had prepared was untouched. Once or twice, during my long watch (I was more than an hour away), he turned towards the food, and made as though he would have eaten it, and then shuddered back; but at last he seized it, and tore it with his teeth, and laughed and rejoiced over it like some starved animal. I could not keep from crying then. He gorged himself with great morsels; and, when he could eat no more, it seemed as if his strength for suffering had come back. He threw himself on the bed, and such a passion of despair I never heard of, much less ever saw. I could not bear to witness it. The dead Miss Phillis lay calm and still. Her trials were over. I would go back and watch with Ethelinda.

When the pale grey morning dawn stole in, making us shiver and shake after our vigil, the squire returned. We were both mortal afraid of him, we knew not why. He looked quiet enough—the lines were worn deep before—no new traces were there. He stood and looked at his aunt for a minute or two. Then he went up into the loft above the room where we were; he brought a small paper parcel down; bade us keep on our watch yet a little time. First one and then the other of us went home to get some food. It was a bitter black frost; no one was out who could stop indoors; and those who were out cared not to stop to speak. Towards afternoon the air darkened, and a great snowstorm came on. We durst not be left only one alone; yet, at the cottage where

Miss Phillis had lived, there was neither fire nor fuel. So we sat and shivered and shook till morning. The squire never came that night nor all next day.

"What must we do?" asked Ethelinda, broken down entirely. "I shall die if I stop here another night. We must tell the neighbours and get help for the watch."

"So we must," said I, very low and grieved. I went out, and told the news at the nearest house, taking care, you may be sure, never to speak of the hunger and cold Miss Phillis must have endured in silence. It was bad enough to have them come in, and make their remarks on the poor bits of furniture; for no one had known their bitter straits even as much as Ethelinda and me, and we had been shocked at the bareness of the place. I did hear that one or two of the more ill-conditioned had said, it was not for nothing we had kept the death to ourselves for two nights; that to judge from the lace on her cap, there must have been some pretty pickings. Ethelinda would have contradicted this, but I bade her let it alone; it would save the memory of the proud Mortons from the shame that poverty is thought to be; and as for us, why, we could live it down. But, on the whole, people came forward kindly; money was not wanting to bury her well, if not grandly, as became her birth; and many a one was bidden to the funeral who might have looked after her a little more in her lifetime. Among others was Squire Hargreaves, from Bothwick Hall over the moors. He was some kind of far-away cousin to the Mortons; so when he came he was asked to go chief mourner in Squire Morton's strange absence, which I should have wondered at the more if I had not thought him almost crazy when I watched his ways through the shutter that night. Squire Hargreaves started when they paid him the compliment of asking him to take the head of the coffin.

"Where is her nephew?" asked he.

"No one has seen him since eight o'clock last Thursday morning."

"But I saw him at noon on Thursday," said Squire

Hargreaves, with a round oath. "He came over the moors to tell me of his aunt's death, and to ask me to give him a little money to bury her, on the pledge of his gold shirt-buttons. He said I was a cousin, and could pity a gentleman in such sore need; that the buttons were his mother's first gift to him; and that I was to keep them safe, for some day he would make his fortune, and come back to redeem them. He had not known his aunt was so ill, or he would have parted with these buttons sooner, though he held them as more precious than he could tell me. I gave him money; but I could not find in my heart to take the buttons. He bade me not tell of all this; but when a man is missing it is my duty to give all the clue I can."

And so their poverty was blazoned abroad! But folk forgot it all in the search for the squire on the moor-side. Two days they searched in vain; the third, upwards of a hundred men turned out, hand-in-hand, step to step, to leave no foot of ground unsearched. They found him stark and stiff, with Squire Hargreaves' money and his mother's gold buttons safe in his waistcoat pocket.

And we laid him down by the side of his poor aunt Phillis.

After the squire, John Marmaduke Morton, had been found dead in that sad way, on the dreary moors, the creditors seemed to lose all hold on the property; which indeed, during the seven years they had had it, they had drained as dry as a sucked orange. But for a long time no one seemed to know who rightly was the owner of Morton Hall and lands. The old house fell out of repair; the chimneys were full of starlings' nests; the flags in the terrace in front were hidden by the long grass; the panes in the windows were broken, no one knew how or why, for the children of the village got up a tale that the house was haunted. Ethelinda and I went sometimes in the summer mornings, and gathered some of the roses that were being strangled by the bind-weed that spread over all; and we used to try and weed the old flower-garden a little; but we were no longer young, and the stooping made our backs ache. Still we always felt happy if we

cleared but ever such a little space. Yet we did not go there willingly in the afternoons, and left the garden always long before the first slight shade of dusk.

We did not choose to ask the common people—many of them were weavers for the Drumble manufacturers, and no longer decent hedgers and ditchers—we did not choose to ask them, I say, who was squire now, or where he lived. But one day, a great London lawyer came to the Morton Arms, and made a pretty stir. He came on behalf of a General Morton, who was squire now, though he was far away in India. He had been written to, and they had proved him heir, though he was a very distant cousin, farther back than Sir John, I think. And now he had sent word they were to take money of his that was in England, and put the house in thorough repair; for that three maiden sisters of his, who lived in some town in the north, would come and live at Morton Hall till his return. So the lawyer sent for a Drumble builder and gave him directions. We thought it would have been prettier if he had hired John Cobb, the Morton builder and joiner, he that had made the squire's coffin, and the squire's father's before that. Instead, came a troop of Drumble men, knocking and tumbling about in the Hall, and making their jests up and down all those stately rooms. Ethelinda and I never went near the place till they were gone, bag and baggage. And then what a change! The old casement windows, with their heavy leaded panes half overgrown with vines and roses, were taken away, and great staring sash windows were in their stead. New grates inside; all modern, new-fangled, and smoking, instead of the brass dogs which held the mighty logs of wood in the old squire's time. The little square Turkey carpet under the dining-table, which had served Miss Phillis, was not good enough for these new Mortons; the dining-room was all carpeted over. We peeped into the old dining-parlour—that parlour where the dinner for the Puritan preachers had been laid out; the flag parlour, as it had been called of late years. But it had a damp, earthy smell, and was used as a lumber-

room. We shut the door quicker than we had opened it. We came away disappointed. The Hall was no longer like our own honoured Morton Hall.

"After all, these three ladies are Mortons," said Ethelinda to me. "We must not forget that; we must go and pay our duty to them as soon as they have appeared in church."

Accordingly we went. But we had heard and seen a little of them before we paid our respects at the Hall. Their maid had been down in the village: their maid, as she was called now; but a maid-of-all-work she had been until now, as she very soon let out when we questioned her. However, we were never proud; and she was a good honest farmer's daughter out of Northumberland. What work she did make with the Queen's English! The folk in Lancashire are said to speak broad, but I could always understand our own kindly tongue; whereas, when Mrs. Turner told me her name, both Ethelinda and I could have sworn she said Donagh, and were afraid she was an Irishwoman. Her ladies were what you may call past the bloom of youth: Miss Sophronia—Miss Morton, properly—was just sixty; Miss Annabella, three years younger; and Miss Dorothy (or Baby, as they called her when they were by themselves) was two years younger still. Mrs. Turner was very confidential to us, partly because, I doubt not, she had heard of our old connection with the family, and partly because she was an arrant talker, and was glad of anybody who would listen to her. So we heard the very first week how each of the ladies had wished for the east bedroom—that which faced the north-east—which no one slept in in the old squire's days; but there were two steps leading up into it, and, said Miss Sophronia, she would never let a younger sister have a room more elevated than she had herself. She was the eldest, and she had a right to the steps. So she bolted herself in for two days, while she unpacked her clothes, and then came out, looking like a hen that has laid an egg, and defies any one to take that honour from her.

But her sisters were very deferential to her in general; that must be said. They never had more than two black

feathers in their bonnets; while she had always three. Mrs. Turner said that once, when they thought Miss Annabella had been going to have an offer of marriage made her, Miss Sophronia had not objected to her wearing three that winter; but when it all ended in smoke, Miss Annabella had to pluck it out, as became a younger sister. Poor Miss Annabella! She had been a beauty (Mrs. Turner said), and great things had been expected of her. Her brother, the general, and her mother had both spoilt her, rather than cross her unnecessarily, and so spoil her good looks; which old Mrs. Morton had always expected would make the fortune of the family. Her sisters were angry with her for not having married some great rich gentleman; though, as she used to say to Mrs. Turner, how could she help it? She was willing enough, but no rich gentleman came to ask her. We agreed that it really was not her fault; but her sisters thought it was; and now that she had lost her beauty, they were always casting it up what they would have done if they had had her gifts. There were some Miss Burrells they had heard of, each of whom had married a lord; and these Miss Burrells had not been such great beauties. So Miss Sophronia used to work the question by the rule of three, and put it in this way—If Miss Burrell, with a tolerable pair of eyes, a snub nose, and a wide mouth, married a baron, what rank of peer ought our pretty Annabella to have espoused? And the worst was, Miss Annabella—who had never had any ambition—wanted to have married a poor curate in her youth; but was pulled up by her mother and sisters reminding her of the duty she owed to her family. Miss Dorothy had done her best—Miss Morton always praised her for it. With not half the good looks of Miss Annabella, she had danced with an honourable at Harrogate three times running; and, even now, she persevered in trying; which was more than could be said of Miss Annabella, who was very broken-spirited.

I do believe Mrs. Turner told us all this before we had ever seen the ladies. We had let them know, through Mrs. Turner, of our wish to pay them our respects; so we ventured to go

up to the front door, and rap modestly. We had reasoned about it before, and agreed that if we were going in our every-day clothes, to offer a little present of eggs, or to call on Mrs. Turner (as she had asked us to do), the back door would have been the appropriate entrance for us. But going, however humbly, to pay our respects, and offer our reverential welcome to the Miss Mortons, we took rank as their visitors, and should go to the front door. We were shown up the wide stairs, along the gallery, up two steps, into Miss Sophronia's room. She put away some papers hastily as we came in. We heard afterwards that she was writing a book, to be called "The Female Chesterfield; or, Letters from a Lady of Quality to her Niece." And the little niece sat there in a high chair, with a flat board tied to her back, and her feet in stocks on the rail of the chair; so that she had nothing to do but listen to her aunt's letters, which were read aloud to her as they were written, in order to mark their effect on her manners. I was not sure whether Miss Sophronia liked our interruption; but I know little Miss Cordelia Mannisty did.

"Is the young lady crooked?" asked Ethelinda, during a pause in our conversation. I had noticed that my sister's eyes would rest on the child; although, by an effort, she succeeded in looking at something else occasionally.

"No! indeed, ma'am," said Miss Morton. "But she was born in India, and her backbone was never properly hardened. Besides, I and my two sisters each take charge of her for a week; and their systems of education—I might say non-education—differ so totally and entirely from my ideas, that when Miss Mannisty comes to me, I consider myself fortunate if I can undo the—hem!—that has been done during a fortnight's absence. Cordelia, my dear, repeat to these good ladies the geography lesson you learnt this morning."

Poor little Miss Mannisty began to tell us a great deal about some river in Yorkshire of which we had never heard, though I dare say we ought to, and then a great deal more about the towns that it passed by, and what they were famous for; and all I can remember—indeed, could understand at

the time—was that Pomfret was famous for Pomfret cakes, which I knew before. But Ethelinda gasped for breath before it was done, she was so nearly choked up with astonishment; and when it was ended, she said, "Pretty dear; it's wonderful!" Miss Morton looked a little displeased, and replied, "Not at all. Good little girls can learn anything they choose, even French verbs. Yes, Cordelia, they can. And to be good is better than to be pretty. We don't think about looks here. You may get down, child, and go into the garden; and take care you put your bonnet on, or you'll be all over freckles." We got up to take leave at the same time, and followed the little girl out of the room. Ethelinda fumbled in her pocket.

"Here's a sixpence, my dear, for you. Nay, I am sure you may take it from an old woman like me, to whom you've told over more geography than I ever thought there was out of the Bible." For Ethelinda always maintained that the long chapters in the Bible which were all names, were geography; and though I knew well enough they were not, yet I had forgotten what the right word was, so I let her alone; for one hard word did as well as another. Little Miss looked as if she was not sure if she might take it; but I suppose we had two kindly old faces, for at last the smile came into her eyes—not to her mouth, she had lived too much with grave and quiet people for that—and, looking wistfully at us, she said—

"Thank you. But won't you go and see Aunt Annabella?" We said we should like to pay our respects to both her other aunts if we might take that liberty; and perhaps she would show us the way. But, at the door of a room, she stopped short and said sorrowfully, "I mayn't go in; it is not my week for being with Aunt Annabella;" and then she went slowly and heavily towards the garden-door.

"That child is cowed by somebody," said I to Ethelinda.

"But she knows a deal of geography"—Ethelinda's speech was cut short by the opening of the door in answer to

our knock. The once beautiful Miss Annabella Morton stood before us, and bade us enter. She was dressed in white, with a turned-up velvet hat, and two or three short drooping black feathers in it. I should not like to say she rouged, but she had a very pretty colour in her cheeks; that much can do neither good nor harm. At first she looked so unlike anybody I had ever seen, that I wondered what the child could have found to like in her; for like her she did, that was very clear. But, when Miss Annabella spoke, I came under the charm. Her voice was very sweet and plaintive, and suited well with the kind of things she said: all about charms of nature, and tears, and grief, and such sort of talk, which reminded me rather of poetry—very pretty to listen to, though I never could understand it as well as plain, comfortable prose. Still, I hardly know why I liked Miss Annabella. I think I was sorry for her; though whether I should have been if she had not put it in my head, I don't know. The room looked very comfortable; a spinnet in a corner to amuse herself with, and a good sofa to lie down upon. By-and-by we got her to talk of her little niece, and she, too, had her system of education. She said she hoped to develop the sensibilities and to cultivate the tastes. While with her, her darling niece read works of imagination, and acquired all that Miss Annabella could impart of the fine arts. We neither of us quite knew what she was hinting at, at the time; but afterwards, by dint of questioning little miss, and using our own eyes and ears, we found that she read aloud to aunt while she lay on the sofa. "Santo Sebastiano; or, The Young Protector," was what they were deep in at this time; and, as it was in five volumes and the heroine spoke broken English—which required to be read twice over to make it intelligible—it lasted them a long time. She also learned to play on the spinnet; not much, for I never heard above two tunes, one of which was "God save the King," and the other was not. But I fancy the poor child was lectured by one aunt, and frightened by the other's sharp ways and numerous fancies. She might well be fond

of her gentle, pensive (Miss Annabella told me she was pensive, so I know I am right in calling her so) aunt, with her soft voice, and her never-ending novels, and the sweet scents that hovered about the sleepy room.

No one tempted us towards Miss Dorothy's apartment when we left Miss Annabella; so we did not see the youngest Miss Morton this first day. We had each of us treasured up many little mysteries to be explained by our dictionary, Mrs. Turner.

"Who is little Miss Mannisty?" we asked in one breath, when we saw our friend from the Hall. And then we learnt that there had been a fourth—a younger Miss Morton, who was no beauty, and no wit, and no anything; so Miss Sophronia, her eldest sister, had allowed her to marry a Mr. Mannisty, and ever after spoke of her as "my poor sister Jane." She and her husband had gone out to India, and both had died there; and the general had made it a sort of condition with her sisters that they should take charge of the child, or else none of them liked children, except Miss Annabella.

"Miss Annabella likes children," said I. "Then that's the reason children like her."

"I can't say she likes children; for we never have any in our house but Miss Cordelia; but her she does like dearly."

"Poor little Miss!" said Ethelinda; "does she never get a game of play with other little girls?" And I am sure from that time Ethelinda considered her in a diseased state from this very circumstance, and that her knowledge of geography was one of the symptoms of the disorder; for she used often to say, "I wish she did not know so much geography! I'm sure it is not quite right."

Whether or not her geography was right, I don't know; but the child pined for companions. A very few days after we had called—and yet long enough to have passed her into Miss Annabella's week—I saw Miss Cordelia in a corner of the church green, playing, with awkward humility, along

with some of the rough village girls, who were as expert at the game as she was unapt and slow. I hesitated a little, and at last I called to her.

"How do you do, my dear?" I said. "How come you here, so far from home?"

She reddened, and then looked up at me with her large, serious eyes.

"Aunt Annabel sent me into the wood to meditate—and—and—it was very dull—and I heard these little girls playing and laughing—and I had my sixpence with me, and—it was not wrong, was it, ma'am?—I came to them, and told one of them I would give it to her if she would ask the others to let me play with them."

"But, my dear, they are—some of them—very rough little children, and not fit companions for a Morton."

"But I am a Mannisty, ma'am!" she pleaded, with so much entreaty in her ways, that, if I had not known what naughty, bad girls some of them were, I could not have resisted her longing for companions of her own age. As it was, I was angry with them for having taken her sixpence; but, when she had told me which it was, and saw that I was going to reclaim it, she clung to me, and said—

"Oh! don't, ma'am—you must not. I gave it to her quite of my own self."

So I turned away; for there was truth in what the child said. But to this day I have never told Ethelinda what became of her sixpence. I took Miss Cordelia home with me while I changed my dress, to be fit to take her back to the Hall. And on the way, to make up for her disappointment, I began talking of my dear Miss Phillis, and her bright pretty youth. I had never named her name since her death to any one but Ethelinda—and that only on Sundays and quiet times. And I could not have spoken of her to a grown-up person: but somehow to Miss Cordelia it came out quite naturally. Not of her latter days, of course; but of her pony, and her little black King Charles's dogs, and all the living creatures that were glad in her presence when first

I knew her. And nothing would satisfy the child but I must go into the Hall garden and show her where Miss Phillis's garden had been. We were deep in our talk, and she was stooping down to clear the plot from weeds, when I heard a sharp voice cry out, "Cordelia! Cordelia! Dirtying your frock with kneeling on the wet grass! It is not my week; but I shall tell your aunt Annabella of you."

And the window was shut down with a jerk. It was Miss Dorothy. And I felt almost as guilty as poor little Miss Cordelia; for I had heard from Mrs. Turner that we had given great offence to Miss Dorothy by not going to call on her in her room that day on which we had paid our respects to her sisters; and I had a sort of an idea that seeing Miss Cordelia with me was almost as much of a fault as the kneeling down on the wet grass. So I thought I would take the bull by the horns

"Will you take me to your aunt Dorothy, my dear?" said I.

The little girl had no longing to go into her aunt Dorothy's room, as she had so evidently had at Miss Annabella's door. On the contrary, she pointed it out to me at a safe distance, and then went away in the measured step she was taught to use in that house; where such things as running, going upstairs two steps at a time, or jumping down three, were considered undignified and vulgar. Miss Dorothy's room was the least prepossessing of any. Somehow it had a north-east look about it, though it did face direct south; and as for Miss Dorothy herself, she was more like a "cousin Betty" than anything else; if you know what a cousin Betty is, and perhaps it is too old-fashioned a word to be understood by any one who has learnt the foreign languages; but when I was a girl, there used to be poor crazy women rambling about the country, one or two in a district. They never did any harm that I know of; they might have been born idiots, poor creatures! or crossed in love, who knows? But they roamed the country, and were well-known at the farmhouses, where they often got food and shelter for as long a time as

their restless minds would allow them to stay in any one place; and the farmer's wife would, maybe, rummage up a ribbon, or a feather, or a smart old breadth of silk, to please the harmless vanity of these poor crazy women; and they would go about so bedizened sometimes that, as we called them always "cousin Betty," we made it into a kind of proverb for any one dressed in a flyaway, showy style, and said they were like a cousin Betty. So now you know what I mean that Miss Dorothy was like. Her dress was white, like Miss Annabella's; but, instead of the black velvet hat her sister wore, she had on, even in the house, a small black silk bonnet. This sounds as if it should be less like a cousin Betty than a hat; but wait till I tell you how it was lined,—with strips of red silk, broad near the face, narrow near the brim; for all the world like the rays of the rising sun, as they are painted on the public-house sign. And her face was like the sun; as round as an apple; and with rouge on, without any doubt: indeed, she told me once, a lady was not dressed unless she had put her rouge on. Mrs. Turner told us she studied reflections a great deal: not that she was a thinking woman in general, I should say; and that this rayed lining was the fruit of her study. She had her hair pulled together, so that her forehead was quite covered with it; and I won't deny that I rather wished myself at home, as I stood facing her in the doorway. She pretended she did not know who I was, and made me tell all about myself; and then it turned out she knew all about me, and she hoped I had recovered from my fatigue the other day.

"What fatigue?" asked I immovably. Oh! she had understood I was very much tired after visiting her sisters; otherwise, of course, I should not have felt it too much to come on to her room. She kept hinting at me in so many ways, that I could have asked her gladly to slap my face and have done with it, only I wanted to make Miss Cordelia's peace with her for kneeling down and dirtying her frock. I did say what I could to make things straight; but I don't know if I did any good. Mrs. Turner told me how suspicious

and jealous she was of everybody, and of Miss Annabella in particular, who had been set over her in her youth because of her beauty; but since it had faded, Miss Morton and Miss Dorothy had never ceased pecking at her; and Miss Dorothy worst of all. If it had not been for little Miss Cordelia's love, Miss Annabella might have wished to die; she did often wish she had had the small-pox as a baby. Miss Morton was stately and cold to her, as one who had not done her duty to her family, and was put in the corner for her bad behaviour. Miss Dorothy was continually talking at her, and particularly dwelling on the fact of her being the older sister. Now she was but two years older, and was still so pretty and gentle-looking, that I should have forgotten it continually but for Miss Dorothy.

The rules that were made for Miss Cordelia! She was to eat her meals standing, that was one thing! Another was, that she was to drink two cups of cold water before she had any pudding; and it just made the child loathe cold water. Then there were ever so many words she might not use; each aunt had her own set of words which were ungenteel or improper for some reason or another. Miss Dorothy would never let her say "red;" it was always to be pink, or crimson, or scarlet. Miss Cordelia used at one time to come to us, and tell us she had a "pain at her chest" so often, that Ethelinda and I began to be uneasy, and questioned Mrs. Turner to know if her mother had died of consumption; and many a pot of good currant jelly have I given her, and only made her pain at the chest worse; for—would you believe it?—Miss Morton told her never to say she had got a stomach-ache, for that it was not proper to say so. I had heard it called by a worse name still in my youth, and so had Ethelinda; and we sat and wondered to ourselves how it was that some kinds of pain were genteel and others were not. I said that old families like the Mortons generally thought it showed good blood to have their complaints as high in the body as they could—brain-fevers and headaches had a better sound, and did perhaps

belong more to the aristocracy. I thought I had got the right view in saying this, when Ethelinda would put in that she had often heard of Lord Toffey having the gout and being lame, and that nonplussed me. If there is one thing I do dislike more than another, it is a person saying something on the other side when I am trying to make up my mind—how can I reason if I am to be disturbed by another person's arguments?

But though I tell all these peculiarities of the Miss Mortons, they were good women in the main: even Miss Dorothy had her times of kindness, and really did love her little niece, though she was always laying traps to catch her doing wrong. Miss Morton I got to respect, if I never liked her. They would ask us up to tea; and we would put on our best gowns; and, taking the house-key in my pocket, we used to walk slowly through the village, wishing that people who had been living in our youth could have seen us now, going by invitation to drink tea with the family at the Hall—not in the housekeeper's room, but with the family, mind you. But since they began to weave in Morton, everybody seemed too busy to notice us; so we were fain to be content with reminding each other how we should never have believed it in our youth that we could have lived to this day. After tea, Miss Morton would set us to talk of the real old family whom they had never known; and you may be sure we told of all their pomp and grandeur and stately ways; but Ethelinda and I never spoke of what was to ourselves like the memory of a sad, terrible dream. So they thought of the squire in his coach-and-four as high sheriff, and madam lying in her morning-room in her Genoa velvet wrapping-robe, all over peacock's eyes (it was a piece of velvet the squire brought back from Italy, when he had been the grand tour), and Miss Phillis going to a ball at a great lord's house and dancing with a royal duke. The three ladies were never tired of listening to the tale of the splendour that had been going on here, while they and their mother had been starving in genteel poverty up in

Northumberland; and as for Miss Cordelia, she sat on a stool at her aunt Annabella's knee, her hand in her aunt's, and listened, open-mouthed and unnoticed, to all we could say.

One day, the child came crying to our house. It was the old story: aunt Dorothy had been so unkind to aunt Annabella! The little girl said she would run away to India, and tell her uncle the general, and seemed in such a paroxysm of anger, and grief, and despair, that a sudden thought came over me. I thought I would try and teach her something of the deep sorrow that lies awaiting all at some part of their lives, and of the way in which it ought to be borne, by telling her of Miss Phillis's love and endurance for her wasteful, handsome nephew. So from little, I got to more, and I told her all; the child's great eyes filling slowly with tears, which brimmed over and came rolling down her cheeks unnoticed as I spoke. I scarcely needed to make her promise not to speak about all this to any one. She said, "I could not—no! not even to aunt Annabella." And to this day she never has named it again, not even to me; but she tried to make herself more patient, and more silently helpful in the strange household among whom she was cast.

By-and-by, Miss Morton grew pale, and grey, and worn, amid all her stiffness. Mrs. Turner whispered to us that, for all her stern, unmoved looks, she was ill unto death; that she had been secretly to see the great doctor at Drumble; and he had told her she must set her house in order. Not even her sisters knew this; but it preyed upon Mrs. Turner's mind, and she told us. Long after this, she kept up her week of discipline with Miss Cordelia, and walked in her straight, soldier-like way about the village, scolding people for having too large families, and burning too much coal, and eating too much butter. One morning she sent Mrs. Turner for her sisters; and, while she was away, she rummaged out an old locket made of the four Miss Mortons' hair when they were all children; and, threading the eye of

the locket with a piece of brown ribbon, she tied it round Cordelia's neck, and, kissing her, told her she had been a good girl, and had cured herself of stooping; that she must fear God and honour the king; and that now she might go and have a holiday. Even while the child looked at her in wonder at the unusual tenderness with which this was said, a grim spasm passed over her face, and Cordelia ran in affright to call Mrs. Turner. But when she came, and the other two sisters came, she was quite herself again. She had her sisters in her room alone when she wished them good-bye; so no one knows what she said, or how she told them (who were thinking of her as in health) that the signs of near-approaching death, which the doctor had foretold, were upon her. One thing they both agreed in saying—and it was much that Miss Dorothy agreed in anything—that she bequeathed her sitting-room, up the two steps, to Miss Annabella, as being next in age. Then they left her room crying, and went both together into Miss Annabella's room, sitting hand in hand (for the first time since childhood, I should think), listening for the sound of the little hand-bell which was to be placed close by her, in case, in her agony, she required Mrs. Turner's presence. But it never rang. Noon became twilight. Miss Cordelia stole in from the garden with its long, black, green shadows, and strange eerie sounds of the night wind through the trees, and crept to the kitchen fire. At last Mrs. Turner knocked at Miss Morton's door, and hearing no reply, went in and found her cold and dead in her chair.

I suppose that some time or other we had told them of the funeral the old squire had; Miss Phillis's father, I mean. He had had a procession of tenantry half a mile long to follow him to the grave. Miss Dorothy sent for me to tell her what tenantry of her brother's could follow Miss Morton's coffin; but what with people working in mills, and land having passed away from the family, we could but muster up twenty people, men and women and all; and one or two were dirty enough to be paid for their loss of time.

Poor Miss Annabella did not wish to go into the room up two steps; nor yet dared she stay behind; for Miss Dorothy, in a kind of spite for not having had it bequeathed to her, kept telling Miss Annabella it was her duty to occupy it; that it was Miss Sophronia's dying wish; and that she should not wonder if Miss Sophronia were to haunt Miss Annabella, if she did not leave her warm room, full of ease and sweet scent, for the grim north-east chamber. We told Mrs. Turner we were afraid Miss Dorothy would lord it sadly over Miss Annabella, and she only shook her head; which, from so talkative a woman, meant a great deal. But, just as Miss Cordelia had begun to droop, the general came home, without any one knowing he was coming. Sharp and sudden was the word with him. He sent Miss Cordelia off to school; but not before she had had time to tell us that she loved her uncle dearly, in spite of his quick, hasty ways. He carried his sisters off to Cheltenham; and it was astonishing how young they made themselves look before they came back again. He was always here, there, and everywhere; and very civil to us into the bargain; leaving the key of the Hall with us whenever they went from home. Miss Dorothy was afraid of him, which was a blessing, for it kept her in order; and really I was rather sorry when she died; and, as for Miss Annabella, she fretted after her till she injured her health, and Miss Cordelia had to leave school to come and keep her company.

Miss Cordelia was not pretty; she had too sad and grave a look for that; but she had winning ways, and was to have her uncle's fortune some day, so I expected to hear of her being soon snapt up. But the general said her husband was to take the name of Morton; and what did my young lady do but begin to care for one of the great mill-owners at Drumble, as if there were not all the lords and commons to choose from besides? Mrs. Turner was dead; and there was no one to tell us about it; but I could see Miss Cordelia growing thinner and paler every time they came back to Morton Hall; and I longed to tell her to pluck

up a spirit, and be above a cotton-spinner. One day, not half a year before the general's death, she came to see us, and told us, blushing like a rose, that her uncle had given his consent; and so, although "he" had refused to take the name of Morton, and had wanted to marry her without a penny, and without her uncle's leave, it had all come right at last, and they were to be married at once; and their house was to be a kind of home for her aunt Annabella, who was getting tired of being perpetually on the ramble with the general.

"Dear old friends!" said our young lady, "you must like him. I am sure you will; he is so handsome, and brave, and good. Do you know, he says a relation of his ancestors lived at Morton Hall in the time of the Commonwealth."

"His ancestors," said Ethelinda. "Has he got ancestors? That's one good point about him, at any rate. I didn't know cotton-spinners had ancestors."

"What is his name?" asked I.

"Mr. Marmaduke Carr," said she, sounding each *r* with the old Northumberland burr, which was softened into a pretty pride and effort to give distinctness to each letter of the beloved name.

"Carr," said I, "Carr and Morton! Be it so! It was prophesied of old!" But she was too much absorbed in the thought of her own secret happiness to notice my poor sayings.

He was and is a good gentleman; and a real gentleman too. They never lived at Morton Hall. Just as I was writing this, Ethelinda came in with two pieces of news. Never again say I am superstitious! There is no one living in Morton that knows the tradition of Sir John Morton and Alice Carr; yet the very first part of the Hall the Drumble builder has pulled down is the old stone dining-parlour, where the great dinner for the preachers mouldered away—flesh from flesh, crumb from crumb! And the street they are going to build right through the rooms through which

Alice Carr was dragged in her agony of despair at her husband's loathing hatred, is to be called Carr Street.

And Miss Cordelia has got a baby—a little girl; and writes in pencil two lines at the end of her husband's note, to say she means to call it Phillis.

Phillis Carr! I am glad he did not take the name of Morton. I like to keep the name of Phillis Morton in my memory very still and unspoken.

TRAITS AND STORIES OF THE HUGUENOTS

I HAVE always been interested in the conversation of any one who could tell me anything about the Huguenots; and, little by little, I have picked up many fragments of information respecting them. I will just recur to the well-known fact, that five years after Henry the Fourth's formal abjuration of the Protestant faith, in fifteen hundred and ninety-three, he secured to the French Protestants their religious liberty by the Edict of Nantes. His unworthy son, however, Louis the Thirteenth, refused them the privileges which had been granted to them by this act; and, when reminded of the claims they had, if the promises of Henry the Third and Henry the Fourth were to be regarded, he answered that "the first-named monarch feared them, and the latter loved them; but he neither feared nor loved them." The extermination of the Huguenots was a favourite project with Cardinal Richelieu, and it was at his instigation that the second seige of Rochelle was undertaken—known even to the most careless student of history for the horrors of famine which the besieged endured. Miserably disappointed as they were at the failure of the looked-for assistance from England, the mayor of the town, Guiton, rejected the conditions of peace which Cardinal Richelieu offered: namely, that they would raze their fortifications to the ground, and suffer the Catholics to enter. But there was a traitorous faction in the town; and, on Guiton's rejection of the terms, this faction collected in one night a crowd of women, and children, and aged persons, and drove them beyond the lines; they

were useless, and yet they ate food. Driven out from the beloved city, tottering, faint, and weary, they were fired at by the enemy; and the survivors came pleading back to the walls of Rochelle, pleading for a quiet shelter to die in, even if their death were caused by hunger. When two-thirds of the inhabitants had perished; when the survivors were insufficient to bury their dead; when ghastly corpses outnumbered the living—miserable, glorious Rochelle, stronghold of the Huguenots, opened its gates to receive the Roman Catholic Cardinal, who celebrated mass in the church of St. Marguerite, once the beloved sanctuary of Protestant worship. As we cling to the memory of the dead, so did the Huguenots remember Rochelle. Years—long years of suffering—gone by, a village sprang up, not twenty miles from New York, and the name of that village was New Rochelle; and the old men told with tears of the suffering their parents had undergone when they were little children, far away across the sea, in the "pleasant" land of France.

Richelieu was otherwise occupied after this second siege of Rochelle, and had to put his schemes for the extermination of the Huguenots on one side. So they lived in a kind of trembling, uncertain peace during the remainder of the reign of Louis the Thirteenth. But they strove to avert persecution by untiring submission. It was not until sixteen hundred and eighty-three that the Huguenots of the south of France resolved to profess their religion, and refuse any longer to be registered among those of the Roman Catholic faith; to be martyrs rather than apostates or hypocrites. On an appointed Sabbath, the old deserted Huguenot churches were re-opened; nay, those in ruins, of which but a few stones remained to tell the tale of having once been holy ground, were peopled with attentive hearers, listening to the word of God as preached by reformed ministers. Languedoc, the Cevennes, Dauphiny, seemed alive with Huguenots—even as the Highlands were, at the chieftain's call, alive with armed men, whose tartans had been hidden but a moment before in the harmonious and blending colours of the heather.

Dragonnades took place, and cruelties were perpetrated which it is as well, for the honour of human nature, should be forgotten. Twenty-four thousand conversions were announced to Le Grand Louis, who fully believed in them. The more far-seeing Madame de Maintenon hinted at her doubts in the famous speech, "Even if the fathers are hypocrites, the children will be Catholics."

And then came the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. A multitude of weak reasons were alleged, as is generally the case where there is not one that is really good, or presentable: such as that the Edict was never meant to be perpetual; that (by the blessing of Heaven and the dragonnades) the Huguenots had returned to the true faith, therefore the Edict was useless—a mere matter of form, &c. &c.

As a "mere matter of form," some penalties were decreed against the professors of the extinct heresy. Every Huguenot place of worship was to be destroyed; every minister who refused to conform was to be sent to the Hôpitaux de Forçats at Marseilles and at Valance. If he had been noted for his zeal he was to be considered "obstinate," and sent to slavery for life in such of the West-Indian islands as belonged to the French. The children of Huguenot parents were to be taken from them by force, and educated by the Roman Catholic monks or nuns. These are but a few of the enactments contained in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

And now come in some of the traditions which I have heard and collected.

A friend of mine, a descendant from some of the Huguenots who succeeded in emigrating to England, has told me the following particulars of her great-great-grandmother's escape. This lady's father was a Norman farmer, or rather small landed proprietor. His name was Lefebvre; he had two sons, grown men, stout and true; able to protect themselves, and choose their own line of conduct. But he had also one little daughter, Magdalen, the child of his old age, and the darling of his house, keeping it alive and glad with her innocent prattle. His small estate was far away from

any large town, with its corn-fields and orchards surrounding the old ancestral house. There was plenty always in it; and though the wife was an invalid, there was always a sober cheerfulness present, to give a charm to the abundance.

The family Lefebvre lived almost entirely on the produce of the estate, and had little need for much communication with their nearest neighbours, with whom, however, as kindly well-meaning people, they were on good terms, although they differed in their religion. In those days, coffee was scarcely known, even in large cities; honey supplied the place of sugar; and for the pottage, the *bouilli*, the vegetables, the salad, the fruit, the garden, farm, and orchards of the Lefebvres was all-sufficient. The woollen cloth was spun by the men of the house on winter's evenings, standing by the great wheel, and carefully and slowly turning it to secure evenness of thread. The women took charge of the linen, gathering and drying, and beating the bad-smelling hemp, the ugliest crop that grew about the farm; and reserving the delicate blue-flowered flax for the fine thread needed for the daughter's *trousseau;* for as soon as a woman-child was born, the mother, lying too faint to work, smiled as she planned the web of dainty linen, which was to be woven at Rouen, out of the flaxen thread of gossamer fineness, to be spun by no hand, as you may guess, but that mother's own. And the farm maidens took pride in the store of sheets and table napery which they were to have a share in preparing for the future wedding of the little baby, sleeping serene in her warm cot by her mother's side. Such being the self-sufficient habits of the Norman farmers, it was no wonder that, in the eventful year of sixteen hundred and eighty-five, Lefebvre remained ignorant for many days of that Revocation which was stirring the whole souls of his co-religionists. But there was to be a cattle fair at Avranches, and he needed a barren cow to fatten up and salt for the winter's provision. Accordingly, the large-boned Norman horse was accoutred, summer as it was, with all its paraphernalia of high-peaked wooden saddle, blue sheep-skin, scarlet

worsted fringe and tassels; and the farmer Lefebvre, slightly stiff in his limbs after sixty winters, got on from the horse-block by the stable wall, his little daughter Magdalen nodding and kissing her hand as he rode away. When he arrived at the fair in the great place before the cathedral in Avranches, he was struck with the absence of many of those who were united to him by the bond of their common persecuted religion; and on the faces of the Huguenot farmers who were there was an expression of gloom and sadness. In answer to his inquiries, he learnt for the first time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. He and his sons could sacrifice anything—would be proud of martyrdom, if need were—but the clause which cut him to the heart was that which threatened that his pretty, innocent sweet Magdalen might be taken from him and consigned to the teachings of a convent. A convent, to the Huguenots' excited prejudices, implied a place of dissolute morals, as well as of idolatrous doctrine.

Poor Farmer Lefebvre thought no more of the cow he went to purchase; the life and death—nay, the salvation or damnation—of his darling seemed to him to depend on the speed with which he could reach his home, and take measures for her safety. What these were to be he could not tell in this moment of bewildered terror; for, even while he watched the stable-boy at the inn arranging his horse's gear, without daring to help him, for fear his early departure and undue haste might excite suspicion in the malignant faces he saw gathering about him—even while he trembled with impatience, his daughter might be carried away out of his sight for ever and ever. He mounted and spurred the old horse; but the road was hilly, and the steed had not had his accustomed rest, and was poorly fed, according to the habit of the country; and, at last, he almost stood still at the foot of every piece of rising ground. Farmer Lefebvre dismounted, and ran by the horse's side up every hill, pulling him along, and encouraging his flagging speed by every conceivable noise, meant to be cheerful, though the tears were

fast running down the old man's cheeks. He was almost sick with the revulsion of his fears, when he saw Magdalen sitting out in the sun, playing with the "fromages" of the mallow-plant, which are such a delight to Norman children. He got off his horse, which found its accustomed way into the stable. He kissed Magdalen over and over again, the tears coming down his cheeks like rain. And then he went in to tell his wife—his poor invalid wife. She received the news more tranquilly than he had done. Long illness had deadened the joys and fears of this world to her. She could even think and suggest. "That night a fishing-smack was to sail from Granville to the Channel Islands. Some of the people, who had called at the Lefebvre farm on their way to Avranches, had told her of ventures they were making, in sending over apples and pears to be sold in Jersey, where the orchard crops had failed. The captain was a friend of one of her absent sons: for his sake"——

"But we must part from *her*—from Magdalen, the apple of our eyes. And she—she has never left her home before, never been away from us—who will take care of her? Marie, I say, who is to take care of the precious child?" And the old man was choked with his sobs. Then his wife made answer, and said—

"God will take care of our precious child, and keep her safe from harm, till we two—or you, at least, dear husband—can leave this accursed land. Or, if we cannot follow her, she will be safe for heaven; whereas, if she stays here to be taken to the terrible convent, hell will be her portion, and we shall never see her again—never!"

So they were stilled by their faith into sufficient composure to plan for the little girl. The old horse was again to be harnessed and put into the cart, and if any spying Romanist looked into the cart, what would they see but straw and a new mattress rolled up, and peeping out of a sackcloth covering? The mother blessed her child, with a full conviction that she should never see her again. The father went with her to Granville. On the way the only

relief he had was caring for her comfort in her strange imprisonment. He stroked her cheeks and smoothed her hair with his labour-hardened fingers, and coaxed her to eat the food her mother had prepared. In the evening her feet were cold; he took off his warm flannel jacket to wrap them in. Whether it was that chill coming on the heat of the excited day, or whether the fatigue and grief broke down the old man utterly, no one can say. The child Magdalen was safely extricated from her hiding-place at the Quai at Granville, and smuggled on board of the fishing-smack, with her great chest of clothes and half-collected *trousseau;* the captain took her safe to Jersey, and willing friends received her eventually in London. But the father—moaning to himself, "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved;" saying that pitiful sentence over and over again, as if the repetition could charm away the deep sense of woe—went home, and took to his bed and died; nor did the mother remain long after him.

One of these Lefebvre sons was the grandfather of the Duke of Dantzic, one of Napoleon's marshals. The little daughter's descendants, though not very numerous, are scattered over England, and one of them, as I have said, is the lady who told me this, and many other particulars relating to the exiled Huguenots.

At first the rigorous decrees of the Revocation were principally enforced against the ministers of religion. They were all required to leave Paris at forty-eight hours' notice, under severe penalties for disobedience. Some of the most distinguished among them were ignominiously forced to leave the country; but the expulsion of these ministers was followed by the emigration of the more faithful among their people. In Languedoc this was especially the case; whole congregations followed their pastors; and France was being rapidly drained of the more thoughtful and intelligent of the Huguenots (who, as a people, had distinguished themselves in manufacture and commerce), when the king's minister took the alarm, and prohibited emigration, under pain of

imprisonment for life; imprisonment for life including abandonment to the tender mercies of the priests. Here again I may relate an anecdote told me by my friend:—A husband and wife attempted to escape separately from some town in Britanny; the wife succeeded and reached England, where she anxiously awaited her husband. The husband was arrested in the attempt, and imprisoned. The priest alone was allowed to visit him; and, after vainly using argument to endeavour to persuade him to renounce his obnoxious religion, the priest, with cruel zeal, had recourse to physical torture. There was a room in the prison with an iron floor, and no seat, nor means of support or rest; into this room the poor Huguenot was introduced. The iron flooring was gradually heated (one remembers the gouty gentleman whose cure was effected by a similar process in "Sandford and Merton;" but there the heat was not carried up to torture, as it was in the Huguenot's case); still the brave man was faithful. The process was repeated; all in vain. The flesh on the soles of his feet was burnt off, and he was a cripple for life; but, cripple or sound, dead or alive, a Huguenot he remained. And by-and-by they grew weary of their useless cruelty, and the poor man was allowed to hobble about on crutches. How it was that he obtained his liberty at last, my informant could not tell. He only knew that, after years of imprisonment and torture, a poor grey cripple was seen wandering about the streets of London, making vain inquiries for his wife in his broken English, as little understood by most as the Moorish maiden's cry for "Gilbert, Gilbert." Some one at last directed him to a coffee-house near Soho Square, kept by an emigrant, who thrived upon the art, even then national, of making good coffee. It was the resort of the Huguenots, many of whom by this time had turned their intelligence to good account in busy, commercial England.

To this coffee-house the poor cripple hied himself; but no one knew of his wife; she might be alive, or she might be dead; it seemed as if her name had vanished from the

earth. In the corner sat a pedlar, listening to everything but saying nothing. He had come to London to lay in a stock of wares for his rounds. Now the three harbours of the French emigrants were Norwich, where they established the manufacture of Norwich crape; Spitalfields, in London, where they embarked in the silk trade; and Canterbury, where a colony of them carried on one or two delicate employments, such as jewellery, wax-bleaching, &c. The pedlar took Canterbury in his way, and sought among the French residents for a woman who might correspond to the missing wife. She was there, earning her livelihood as a milliner, and believing her husband to be either a galley-slave, or dead long since in some of the terrible prisons. But, on hearing the pedlar's tale, she set off at once to London, and found her poor crippled husband, who lived many years afterwards in Canterbury, supported by his wife's exertions.

Another Huguenot couple determined to emigrate. They could disguise themselves; but their baby? If they were seen passing through the gates of the town in which they lived, with a child, they would instantly be arrested, suspected Huguenots as they were. Their expedient was to wrap the baby into a formless bundle, to one end of which was attached a string; and then, taking advantage of the deep gutter which runs in the centre of so many old streets in French towns, they placed the baby in this hollow, close to one of the gates, after dusk. The gendarme came out to open the gate to them. They were suddenly summoned to see a sick relation, they said; they were known to have an infant child, which no Huguenot mother would willingly leave behind to be brought up by Papists. So the sentinel concluded that they were not going to emigrate, at least this time, and locking the great town-gates behind them, he re-entered his little guard-room. "Now quick! quick! the string under the gate! Catch it with your hook stick! There, in the shadow! There! Thank God! the baby is safe; it has not cried! Pray God the sleeping draught be

not too strong!" It was not too strong. Father, mother, and babe escaped to England; and their descendants may be reading this very paper.

England, Holland, and the Protestant states of Germany were the places of refuge for the Norman and Breton Protestants. From the south of France escape was more difficult. Algerine pirates infested the Mediterranean, and the small vessels in which many of the Huguenots embarked from the southern ports were an easy prey. There were Huguenot slaves in Algiers and Tripoli for years after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Most Catholic Spain caught some of the fugitives, who were welcomed by the Spanish Inquisition with a different kind of greeting from that which the wise, far-seeing William the Third of England bestowed on such of them as sought English shelter after his accession. We will return to the condition of the English Huguenots presently. First, let us follow the fortunes of those French Protestants who sent a letter to the State of Massachusetts (among whose historical papers it is still extant) giving an account of the persecutions to which they were exposed, and the distress they were undergoing, stating the wish of many of them to emigrate to America, and asking how far they might have privileges allowed them for following out their pursuit of agriculture. What answer was returned may be guessed from the fact that a tract of land comprising about eleven thousand acres at Oxford, near the present town of Worcester, Massachusetts, was granted to thirty Huguenots, who were invited to come over and settle there. The invitation came like a sudden summons to a land of hope across the Atlantic. There was no time for preparations; these might excite suspicion; they left the "pot boiling on the fire" (to use the expression of one of their descendants), and carried no clothes with them but what they wore. The New Englanders had too lately escaped from religious persecution themselves not to welcome and shelter and clothe these poor refugees when they once arrived at Boston. The little French colony at Oxford

was called a plantation, and Gabriel Bernon, a descendant of a knightly name in Froissart, a Protestant merchant of Rochelle, was appointed undertaker for this settlement. They sent for a French Protestant minister, and assigned to him a salary of forty pounds a year. They bent themselves assiduously to the task of cultivating the half-cleared land, on the borders of which lay the dark forest, among which the Indians prowled and lurked ready to spring upon the unguarded households. To protect themselves from this creeping deadly enemy the French built a fort, traces of which yet remain. But on the murder of the Johnson family the French dared no longer remain on the bloody spot, although more than ten acres of ground were in garden cultivation around the fort; and, long afterwards, those who told in hushed, awe-struck voices of the Johnson murder, could point to the rose-bushes, the apple and pear trees yet standing in the Frenchmen's deserted gardens. Mrs. Johnson was a sister of Andrew Sigourney, one of the first Huguenots who came over. He saved his sister's life by dragging her by main force through a back door, while the Indians massacred her children, and shot down her husband at his own threshold. To preserve her life was but a cruel kindness.

Gabriel Bernon lived to a patriarchal age, in spite of his early sufferings in France and the wild Indian cries of revenge around his home in Massachusetts. He died rich and prosperous. He had kissed Queen Anne's hand, and become intimate with some of the English nobility, such as Lord Archdale, the Quaker Governor of Carolina, who had lands and governments in the American States. The descendants of the Huguenot refugees repaid in part their debt of gratitude to Massachusetts in various ways during the War of Independence; one, Gabriel Manigault, by advancing a large loan to further the objects of it. Indeed, three of the nine presidents of the old Congress which conducted the United States through the revolutionary war were descendants of the French Protestant refugees. General Francis Marion,

who fought bravely under Washington, was of Huguenot descent. In fact, both in England and France, the Huguenot refugees showed themselves temperate, industrious, thoughtful, and intelligent people, full of good principle and strength of character. But all this is implied in the one circumstance that they suffered and emigrated to secure the rights of conscience.

In the State of New York they fondly called their plantation or settlement by the name of the precious city which had been their stronghold, and where they had suffered so much. New Rochelle was built on the shore of Long Island Sound, twenty-three miles from New York. On the Saturday afternoons the inhabitants of New Rochelle harnessed their horses to their carts, to convey the women and little ones, and the men in the prime of life walked all the distance to New York, camping out in their carts in the environs of the city through the night, till the bell summoned them on Sunday morning to service in the old Church du Saint Esprit. In the same way they returned on Sunday evening. The old longing for home, recorded in Allan Cunningham's ballad—

> "It's hame, and it's hame, hame fain would I be;
> Oh, hame, hame, hame, to my ain countree!"—

clung to the breasts, and caused singular melancholy in some of them. There was one old man who went every day down to the seashore, to look and gaze his fill towards the beautiful cruel land where most of his life had been passed. With his face to the east—his eyes strained as if by force of longing looks he could see the far-distant France—he said his morning prayers and sang one of Clément Marot's hymns. There had been an edition of the Psalms of David put into French rhyme ("Pseaumes de David, mis en Rime françoise, par Clément Marot et Théodore de Bèze"), published in as small a form as possible in order that the book might be concealed in their bosoms if the Huguenots were surprised in their worship while they lived in France.

Nor were Oxford and New Rochelle the only settlements of the Huguenots in the United States. Further south again they were welcomed, and found resting-places in Virginia and South Carolina.

I now return to the Huguenots in England. Even during James the Second's reign, collections were made for the refugees; and, in the reign of his successor, fifteen thousand pounds were voted by Parliament "to be distributed among persons of quality, and all such as, by age or infirmity, were unable to support themselves." There are still, or were, not many years ago, a few survivors of the old Huguenot stock, who go, on quarter-day, to claim their small benefit from this fund at the Treasury; and, doubtless, at the time it was granted there were many friendless and helpless to whom the little pensions were inestimable boons. But the greater part were active, strong men, full of good sense and practical talent; and they preferred taking advantage of the national good-will in a more independent form. Their descendants bear honoured names among us. Sir Samuel Romilly, Mrs. Austin, and Miss Harriet Martineau are three of those that come most prominently before me as I write; but each of these names is suggestive of others in the same families worthy of note. Sir Samuel Romilly's ancestors came from the south of France, where the paternal estate fell to a distant relation rather than to the son, because the former was a Catholic, while the latter had preferred a foreign country with "freedom to worship God." In Sir Samuel Romilly's account of his father and grandfather, it is easy to detect the southern character predominating. Most affectionate, impulsive, generous, carried away by transports of anger and of grief, tender and true in all his relationships—the reader does not easily forget the father of Sir Samuel Romilly, with his fond adoption of Montaigne's idea, "playing on a flute by the side of his daughter's bed, in order to waken her in the morning." No wonder he himself was so beloved! But there was much more demonstration of affection in all these French households, if what I have gathered from their

descendants be correct, than we English should ever dare to manifest.

French was the language still spoken among themselves sixty and seventy years after their ancestors had quitted France. In the Romilly family, the father established it as a rule that French should be always spoken on a Sunday. Forty years later, the lady to whom I have so often alluded was living, an orphan child with two maiden aunts, in the heart of London city. They always spoke French. English was the foreign language; and a certain pride was cultivated in the little damsel's mind by the fact of her being reminded every now and then that she was a little French girl, bound to be polite, gentle, and attentive in manners; to stand till her elders gave her leave to sit down; to curtsey on entering or leaving a room. She attended her relations to the early market near Spitalfields, where many herbs, not in general use in England, and some "weeds," were habitually brought by the market-women for the use of the French people. Burnet, chervil, dandelion, were amongst the number, in order to form the salads which were a principal dish at meals. There were still hereditary schools in the neighbourhood, kept by descendants of the first refugees who established them, and to which the Huguenot families still sent their children. A kind of correspondence was occasionally kept up with the unseen and distant relations in France—third or fourth cousins, it might be. As was to be expected, such correspondence languished and died by slow degrees. But tales of their ancestor's sufferings and escapes beguiled the long winter evenings. Though far away from France, though cast off by her a hundred years before, the gentle old ladies, who had lived all their lives in London, considered France as their country, and England as a strange land. Upstairs, too, was a great chest—the very chest Madame Lefebvre had had packed to accompany her in her flight and escape in the mattress. The stores her fond mother had provided for her *trousseau* were not yet exhausted, though she slept in her grave; and out of them her little

orphan descendant was dressed; and, when the quaintness of the pattern made the child shrink from putting on so peculiar a dress, she was asked, "Are you not a little French girl? You ought to be proud of wearing a French print—there are none like it in England." In all this, her relations and their circle seem to have differed from the refugee friends of old Mr. Romilly, who, we are told, "desired nothing less than to preserve the memory of their origin; and their chapels were therefore ill-attended. A large, uncouth room, the avenues to which were narrow courts and dirty alleys, . . . with irregular unpainted pews and dusty unplastered walls; a congregation consisting principally of some strange-looking old women scattered here and there," &c. Probably these old ladies looked strange to the child, who recorded these early impressions in after-life, because they clung with fond pride to the dress of their ancestors, and decked themselves out in the rich grotesque raiment which had formed part of their mother's *trousseau*. At any rate, there certainly was a little colony in the heart of the city, at the end of the last century, who took pride in their descent from the suffering Huguenots, who mustered up relics of the old homes and the old times in Normandy or Languedoc. A sword wielded by some great-grandfather in the wars of the League; a gold whistle, such as hung ever ready at the master's girdle before bells were known in houses, or ready to summon out-of-door labourers; some of the very ornaments sold at the famous curiosity-shop at Warwick for ladies to hang at their *châtelaines*, within this last ten years, were brought over by the flying Huguenots. And there were precious Bibles, secured by silver clasps and corners; strangely-wrought silver spoons, the handle of which enclosed the bowl; a travelling-case, containing a gold knife, spoon, and fork, and a crystal goblet, on which the coat-of-arms was engraved in gold. All these, and many other relics, tell of the affluence and refinement the refugees left behind for the sake of their religion.

There is yet an hospital (or rather great almshouse) for

aged people of French descent somewhere near the City Road, which is supported by the proceeds of land bequeathed, I believe, by some of the first refugees, who were prosperous in trade after settling in England. But it has lost much of its distinctive national character. Fifty or sixty years ago, a visitor might have heard the inmates of this hospital chattering away in antiquated French. Now they speak English, for the majority of their ancestors in four generations have been English, and probably some of them do not know a word of French. Each inmate has a comfortable bedroom, a small annuity for clothes, &c., and sits and has meals in a public dining-room. As a little amusing mark of deference to the land of their founders, I may mention that a Mrs. Stephens, who was admitted within the last thirty years, became Madame St. Etienne as soon as she entered the hospital.

I have now told all I know about the Huguenots. I pass the mark to some one else.

MY FRENCH MASTER

CHAPTER I

My father's house was in the country, seven miles away from the nearest town. He had been an officer in the navy; but, as he had met with some accident that would disable him from ever serving again, he gave up his commission, and his half-pay. He had a small private fortune, and my mother had not been penniless; so he purchased a house, and ten or twelve acres of land, and set himself up as an amateur farmer on a very small scale. My mother rejoiced over the very small scale of his operations; and when my father regretted, as he did very often, that no more land was to be purchased in the neighbourhood, I could see her setting herself a sum in her head, "If on twelve acres he manages to lose a hundred pounds a year, what would be our loss on a hundred and fifty?" But when my father was pushed hard on the subject of the money he spent in his sailor-like farming, he had one constant retreat—

"Think of the health, and the pleasure we all of us take in the cultivation of the fields around us! It is something for us to do, and to look forward to every day." And this was so true, that, as long as my father confined himself to these arguments, my mother left him unmolested: but to strangers he was still apt to enlarge on the returns his farm brought him in; and he had often to pull up in his statements when he caught the warning glance of my mother's eye, showing him that she was not so much absorbed in her own conversation as to be deaf to his voice. But as for the happiness that arose out of our mode of life, that was not

to be calculated by tens or hundreds of pounds. There were only two of us, my sister and myself; and my mother undertook the greater part of our education. We helped her in her household cares during part of the morning; then came an old-fashioned routine of lessons, such as she herself had learnt when a girl—Goldsmith's "History of England," Rollin's "Ancient History," Lindley Murray's Grammar, and plenty of sewing and stitching.

My mother used sometimes to sigh, and wish that she could buy us a piano, and teach us what little music she knew; but many of my dear father's habits were expensive; at least, for a person possessed of no larger an income than he had. Besides the quiet and unsuspected drain of his agricultural pursuits, he was of a social turn; enjoying the dinners to which he was invited by his more affluent neighbours; and especially delighted in returning them the compliment, and giving them choice little entertainments, which would have been yet more frequent in their recurrence than they were, if it had not been for my mother's prudence. But we never were able to purchase the piano; it required a greater outlay of ready money than we ever possessed. I dare say we should have grown up ignorant of any language but our own if it had not been for my father's social habits, which led to our learning French in a very unexpected manner. He and my mother went to dine with General Ashburton, one of the forest rangers; and there they met with an emigrant gentleman, a Monsieur de Chalabre, who had escaped in a wonderful manner, and at terrible peril to his life; and was, consequently, in our small forest circle, a great lion, and a worthy cause of a series of dinner-parties. His first entertainer, General Ashburton, had known him in France, under very different circumstances; and he was not prepared for the quiet and dignified request made by his guest, one afternoon after M. de Chalabre had been about a fortnight in the forest, that the general would recommend him as a French teacher, if he could conscientiously do so.

To the general's remonstrances, M. de Chalabre smilingly

replied by an assurance that his assumption of his new occupation could only be for a short time; that the good cause would—*must* triumph. It was before the fatal 21st of January, 1793; and then, still smiling, he strengthened his position by quoting innumerable instances out of the classics, of heroes and patriots, generals and commanders, who had been reduced by Fortune's frolics to adopt some occupation far below their original one. He closed his speech with informing the general that, relying upon his kindness in acting as referee, he had taken lodgings for a few months at a small farm which was in the centre of our forest circle of acquaintances. The general was too thoroughly a gentleman to say anything more than that he should be most happy to do whatever he could to forward M. de Chalabre's plans; and as my father was the first person whom he met with after this conversation, it was announced to us, on the very evening of the day on which it had taken place, that we were forthwith to learn French; and I verily believe that, if my father could have persuaded my mother to join him, we should have formed a French class of father, mother, and two head of daughters, so touched had my father been by the general's account of M. de Chalabre's present desires, as compared with the high estate from which he had fallen. Accordingly, we were installed in the dignity of his first French pupils. My father was anxious that we should have a lesson every other day, ostensibly that we might get on all the more speedily, but really that he might have a larger quarterly bill to pay; at any rate, until M. de Chalabre had more of his time occupied with instruction. But my mother gently interfered, and calmed her husband down into two lessons a week, which was, she said, as much as we could manage. Those happy lessons! I remember them now, at the distance of more than fifty years. Our house was situated on the edge of the forest; our fields were, in fact, cleared out of it. It was not good land for clover; but my father would always sow one particular field with clover seed, because my mother was so fond of the fragrant

scent in her evening walks, and through this a footpath ran which led into the forest.

A quarter of a mile beyond—a walk on the soft, fine, springy turf, and under the long, low branches of the beech-trees—and we arrived at the old red-brick farm where M. de Chalabre was lodging. Not that we went there to take our lessons; that would have been an offence to his spirit of politeness; but, as my father and mother were his nearest neighbours, there was a constant interchange of small messages and notes, which we little girls were only too happy to take to our dear M. de Chalabre. Moreover, if our lessons with my mother were ended pretty early, she would say—"You have been good girls; now you may run to the high point in the clover-field, and see if M. de Chalabre is coming; and if he is, you may walk with him; but take care and give him the cleanest part of the path, for you know he does not like to dirty his boots."

This was all very well in theory; but, like many theories, the difficulty was to put it in practice. If we slipped to the side of the path where the water lay longest, he bowed and retreated behind us to a still wetter place, leaving the clean part for us; yet when we got home, his polished boots would be without a speck, while our shoes were covered with mud.

Another little ceremony which we had to get accustomed to, was his habit of taking off his hat as we approached, and walking by us holding it in his hand. To be sure, he wore a wig, delicately powdered, frizzed, and tied in a queue behind; but we had always a feeling that he would catch cold, and that he was doing us too great an honour, and that he did not know how old or rather how young we were, until one day we saw him (far away from our house) hand a countrywoman over a stile with the same kind of dainty, courteous politeness, lifting her basket of eggs over first; and then, taking up the silk-lined lapel of his coat, he spread it on the palm of his hand for her to rest her fingers upon; instead of which, she took his small white hand in her plump, vigorous gripe, and leant her full weight upon him. He

carried her basket for her as far as their roads lay together; and from that time we were less shy in receiving his courtesies, perceiving that he considered them as deference due to our sex, however old or young, or rich or poor. So, as I said, we came down from the clover-field in rather a stately manner, and through the wicket-gate that opened into our garden, which was as rich in its scents of varied kinds as the clover-field had been in its one pure fragrance. My mother would meet us here; and somehow—our life was passed as much out of doors as in-doors, both winter and summer—we seemed to have our French lessons more frequently in the garden than in the house; for there was a sort of arbour on the lawn near the drawing-room window, to which we always found it easy to carry a table and chairs, and all the rest of the lesson paraphernalia, if my mother did not prohibit a lesson *al fresco*.

M. de Chalabre wore, as a sort of morning costume, a coat, waistcoat, and breeches, all made of a kind of coarse grey cloth, which he had bought in the neighbourhood. His three-cornered hat was brushed to a nicety, his wig sat as no one else's did. (My father's was always awry.) And the only thing wanting to his costume when he came was a flower. Sometimes I fancied he purposely omitted gathering one of the roses that clustered up the farmhouse in which he looked, in order to afford my mother the pleasure of culling her choicest carnations and roses to make him up his nosegay, or "posy," as he liked to call it. He had picked up that pretty country word, and adopted it as an especial favourite, dwelling on the first syllable with all the languid softness of an Italian accent. Many a time have Mary and I tried to say it like him, we did so admire his way of speaking.

Once seated round the table, whether in the house or out of it, we were bound to attend to our lessons; and somehow he made us perceive that it was a part of the same chivalrous code that made him so helpful to the helpless, to enforce the slightest claim of duty to the full. No

half-prepared lessons for him! The patience and the resource with which he illustrated and enforced every precept; the untiring gentleness with which he made our stubborn English tongues pronounce, and mis-pronounce, and re-pronounce certain words; above all, the sweetness of temper which never varied, were such as I have never seen equalled. If we wondered at these qualities when we were children, how much greater has been our surprise at their existence since we have been grown up, and have learnt that, until his emigration, he was a man of rapid and impulsive action, with the imperfect education implied in the circumstance that at fifteen he was a sous-lieutenant in the Queen's regiment, and must, consequently, have had to apply himself hard and conscientiously to master the language which he had in after-life to teach.

Twice we had holidays to suit his sad convenience. Holidays with us were not at Christmas, and Midsummer, Easter, and Michaelmas. If my mother was unusually busy, we had what we called a holiday, though, in reality, it involved harder work than our regular lessons; but we fetched, and carried, and ran errands, and became rosy, and dusty, and sang merry songs in the gaiety of our hearts. If the day was remarkably fine, my dear father—whose spirits were rather apt to vary with the weather—would come bursting in with his bright, kind, bronzed face, and carry the day by storm with my mother. "It was a shame to coop such young things up in a house," he would say, "when every other young animal was frolicking in the air and sunshine. Grammar!—what was that but the art of arranging words?—and he never knew a woman but could do that fast enough. Geography!—he would undertake to teach us more geography in one winter evening, telling us of the countries where he had been, with just a map before him, than we could learn in ten years with that stupid book, all full of hard words. As for the French—why, that must be learnt; for he should not like M. de Chalabre to think we slighted the lessons he took so much pains to give us;

but surely we could get up the earlier to learn our French." We promised by acclamation; and my mother—sometimes smilingly, sometimes reluctantly—was always compelled to yield. And these were the usual occasions for our holidays. But twice we had a fortnight's entire cessation of French lessons: once in January, and once in October. Nor did we even see our dear French master during those periods. We went several times to the top of the clover-field, to search the dark green outskirts of the forest with our busy eyes; and if we could have seen his figure in that shade, I am sure we should have scampered to him, forgetful of the prohibition which made the forest forbidden ground. But we did not see him.

It was the fashion in those days to keep children much less informed than they are now on the subjects which interest their parents. A sort of hieroglyphic or cipher talk was used in order to conceal the meaning of much that was said if children were present. My mother was a proficient in this way of talking, and took, we fancied, a certain pleasure in perplexing my father by inventing a new cipher, as it were, every day. For instance, for some time, I was called Martia, because I was very tall of my age; and, just as my father began to understand the name—and, it must be owned, a good while after I had learnt to prick up my ears whenever Martia was named—my mother suddenly changed me into "the buttress," from the habit I had acquired of leaning my languid length against a wall. I saw my father's perplexity about this "buttress" for some days, and could have helped him out of it, but I durst not. And so, when the unfortunate .Louis the Sixteenth was executed, the news was too terrible to be put into plain English, and too terrible also to be made known to us children, nor could we at once find the clue to the cipher in which it was spoken about. We heard about "the Iris being blown down;" and saw my father's honest loyal excitement about it, and the quiet reserve which always betokened some secret grief on my mother's part.

We had no French lessons; and somehow the poor, battered, storm-torn Iris was to blame for this. It was many weeks after this before we knew the full reason of M. de Chalabre's deep depression when he again came amongst us; why he shook his head when my mother timidly offered him some snowdrops on that first morning on which we began lessons again; why he wore the deep mourning of that day, when all of the dress that could be black was black, and the white muslin frills and ruffles were unstarched and limp, as if to bespeak the very abandonment of grief. We knew well enough the meaning of the next hieroglyphic announcement—"The wicked, cruel boys had broken off the White Lily's head!" That beautiful queen, whose portrait once had been shown to us, with her blue eyes, and her fair resolute look, her profusion of lightly powdered hair, her white neck adorned with strings of pearls! We could have cried, if we had dared, when we heard the transparent mysterious words. We did cry at night, sitting up in bed, with our arms round each other's necks, and vowing, in our weak, passionate, childish way, that if we lived long enough, that lady's death avenged should be. No one who cannot remember that time can tell the shudder of horror that thrilled through the country at hearing of this last execution. At the moment, there was no time for any consideration of the silent horrors endured for centuries by the people, who at length rose in their madness against their rulers. This last blow changed our dear M. de Chalabre. I never saw him again in quite the same gaiety of heart as before this time. There seemed to be tears very close behind his smiles for ever after. My father went to see him when he had been about a week absent from us—no reason given, for did not we, did not every one know the horror the sun had looked upon? As soon as my father had gone, my mother gave it in charge to us to make the dressing-room belonging to our guest-chamber as much like a sitting-room as possible. My father hoped to bring back M. de Chalabre for a visit to us; but he would probably like to be a good

deal alone; and we might move any article of furniture we liked, if we only thought it would make him comfortable.

I believe General Ashburton had been on a somewhat similar errand to my father's before; but he had failed. My father gained his point, as I afterwards learnt, in a very unconscious and characteristic manner. He had urged his invitation on M. de Chalabre, and received such a decided negative that he was hopeless, and quitted the subject. Then M. de Chalabre began to relieve his heart by telling him all the details; my father held his breath to listen—at last, his honest heart could contain itself no longer, and the tears ran down his face. His unaffected sympathy touched M. de Chalabre inexpressibly; and in an hour after we saw our dear French master coming down the clover-field slope, leaning on my father's arm, which he had involuntarily offered as a support to one in trouble—although he was slightly lame, and ten or fifteen years older than M. de Chalabre.

For a year after that time, M. de Chalabre never wore any flowers; and after that, to the day of his death, no gay or coloured rose or carnation could tempt him. We secretly observed his taste, and always took care to bring him white flowers for his posy. I noticed, too, that on his left arm, under his coat sleeve (sleeves were made very open then), he always wore a small band of black crape. He lived to be eighty-one, but he had the black crape band on when he died.

M. de Chalabre was a favourite in all the forest circle. He was a great acquisition to the sociable dinner-parties that were perpetually going on; and, though some of the families piqued themselves on being aristocratic, and turned up their noses at any one who had been engaged in trade, however largely, M. de Chalabre, in right of his good blood, his loyalty, his daring *preux chevalier* actions, was ever an honoured guest. He took his poverty, and the simple habits it enforced, so naturally and gaily, as a mere trifling accident of his life, about which neither concealment nor shame could

be necessary, that the very servants—often so much more pseudo-aristocratic than their masters—loved and respected the French gentleman, who, perhaps, came to teach in the mornings, and in the evenings made his appearance dressed with dainty neatness as a dinner guest. He came lightly prancing through the forest mire; and, in our little hall, at any rate, he would pull out a neat minute case containing a blacking-brush and blacking, and repolish his boots, speaking gaily, in his broken English, to the footman all the time. That blacking-case was his own making; he had a genius for using his fingers. After our lessons were over, he relaxed into the familiar house friend, the merry playfellow. We lived far from any carpenter or joiner; if a lock was out of order, M. de Chalabre made it right for us. If any box was wanted, his ingenious fingers had made it before our lesson day. He turned silk-winders for my mother, made a set of chessmen for my father, carved an elegant watch-case out of a rough beef-bone, dressed up little cork dolls for us—in short, as he said, his heart would have been broken but for his joiner's tools. Nor were his ingenious gifts employed for us alone. The farmer's wife where he lodged had numerous contrivances in her house which he had made. One particularly which I remember was a paste-board, made after a French pattern, which would not slip about on a dresser, as he had observed her English paste-board do. Susan, the farmer's ruddy daughter, had her work-box, too, to show us; and her cousin-lover had a wonderful stick, with an extraordinary demon head carved upon it—all by M. de Chalabre. Farmer, farmer's wife, Susan, Robert, and all, were full of his praises.

We grew from children into girls—from girls into women; and still M. de Chalabre taught on in the forest; still he was beloved and honoured; still no dinner-party within five miles was thought complete without him, and ten miles' distance strove to offer him a bed sooner than miss his company. The pretty, merry Susan of sixteen had been jilted by the faithless Robert, and was now a comely, demure damsel of

thirty-one or two; still waiting upon M. de Chalabre, and still constant in respectfully singing his praises. My own poor mother was dead; my sister was engaged to be married to a young lieutenant, who was with his ship in the Mediterranean. My father was as youthful as ever in heart, and, indeed, in many of his ways; only his hair was quite white, and the old lameness was more frequently troublesome than it had been. An uncle of his had left him a considerable fortune, so he farmed away to his heart's content, and lost an annual sum of money with the best grace and the lightest heart in the world. There were not even the gentle reproaches of my mother's eyes to be dreaded now.

Things were in this state when the peace of 1814 was declared. We had heard so many and such contradictory rumours that we were inclined to doubt even the *Gazette* at last, and were discussing probabilities with some vehemence, when M. de Chalabre entered the room unannounced and breathless.

"My friends, give me joy!" he said. "The Bourbons"—he could not go on; his features, nay, his very fingers, worked with agitation, but he could not speak. My father hastened to relieve him.

"We have heard the good news (you see, girls, it is quite true this time). I do congratulate you, my dear friend. I *am* glad." And he seized M. de Chalabre's hand in his own hearty gripe, and brought the nervous agitation of the latter to a close by unconsciously administering a pretty severe dose of wholesome pain.

"I go to London. I go straight this afternoon to see my sovereign. My sovereign holds a court to-morrow at Grillon's Hotel; I go to pay my *devoirs*. I put on my uniform of Gardes du Corps, which has lain by these many years; a little old, a little worm-eaten, but never mind; they have been seen by Marie Antoinette, which gives them a grace for ever." He walked about the room in a nervous, hurried way. There was something on his mind, and we signed to my father to be silent for a moment or two, and

let it come out. "No!" said M. de Chalabre, after a moment's pause. "I cannot say adieu; for I shall return to say, dear friends, my adieux. I did come a poor emigrant; noble Englishmen took me for their friend, and welcomed me to their houses. Chalabre is one large mansion, and my English friends will not forsake me; they will come and see me in my own country; and, for their sakes, not an English beggar shall pass the doors of Chalabre without being warmed and clothed and fed. I will not say adieu. I go now but for two days."

CHAPTER II

My father insisted upon driving M. de Chalabre in his gig to the nearest town through which the London mail passed: and, during the short time that elapsed before my father was ready, he told us something more about Chalabre. He had never spoken of his ancestral home to any of us before; we knew little of his station in his own country. General Ashburton had met with him in Paris, in a set where a man was judged of by his wit and talent for society, and general brilliance of character, rather than by his wealth and hereditary position. Now we learned for the first time that he was heir to considerable estates in Normandy; to an old Château Chalabre; all of which he had forfeited by his emigration, it was true, but that was under another *régime*.

"Ah! if my dear friend, your poor mother, were alive now, I could send her such slips of rare and splendid roses from Chalabre. Often when I did see her nursing up some poor little specimen, I longed in secret for my rose-garden at Chalabre. And the orangerie! Ah! Miss Fanny, the bride must come to Chalabre who wishes for a beautiful wreath." This was an allusion to my sister's engagement; a fact well known to him, as the faithful family friend.

My father came back in high spirits; and began to plan that very evening how to arrange his crops for the ensuing year, so as best to spare time for a visit to Château Chalabre; and as for us, I think we believed that there was no need to delay our French journey beyond the autumn of the present year.

M. de Chalabre came back in a couple of days; a little damped, we girls fancied, though we hardly liked to speak about it to my father. However, M. de Chalabre explained it to us by saying that he had found London more crowded and busy than he had expected; that it was smoky and dismal after leaving the country, where the trees were already coming into leaf; and, when we pressed him a little more respecting the reception at Grillon's, he laughed at himself for having forgotten the tendency of the Count de Provence in former days to become stout, and so being dismayed at the mass of corpulence which Louis the Eighteenth presented, as he toiled up the long drawing-room of the hotel.

"But what did he say to you?" Fanny asked. "How did he receive you when you were presented?"

A flash of pain passed over his face; but it was gone directly.

"Oh! his Majesty did not recognise my name. It was hardly to be expected he would; though it is a name of note in Normandy; and I have——well! that is worth nothing. The Duc de Duras reminded him of a circumstance or two, which I had almost hoped his Majesty would not have forgotten; but I myself forgot the pressure of long years of exile; it was no wonder he did not remember me. He said he hoped to see me at the Tuileries. His hopes are my laws. I go to prepare for my departure. If his Majesty does not need my sword, I turn it into a ploughshare at Chalabre. Ah! my friend, I will not forget there all the agricultural science I have learned from you."

A gift of a hundred pounds would not have pleased my father so much as this last speech. He began forthwith to inquire about the nature of the soil, &c., in a way which

made our poor M. de Chalabre shrug his shoulders in despairing ignorance.

"Never mind!" said my father. "Rome was not built in a day. It was a long time before I learnt all that I know now. I was afraid I could not leave home this autumn, but I perceive you'll need some one to advise you about laying out the ground for next year's crops."

So M. de Chalabre left our neighbourhood, with the full understanding that we were to pay him a visit in his Norman château in the following September; nor was he content until he had persuaded every one who had shown him kindness to promise him a visit at some appointed time. As for his old landlord at the farm, the comely dame, and buxom Susan—they, we found, were to be franked there and back, under the pretence that the French dairymaids had no notion of cleanliness, any more than that the French farming men were judges of stock; so it was absolutely necessary to bring over some one from England to put the affairs of the Château Chalabre in order; and Farmer Dobson and his wife considered the favour quite reciprocal.

For some time we did not hear from our friend. The war had made the post between France and England very uncertain; so we were obliged to wait, and we tried to be patient; but, somehow, our autumn visit to France was silently given up; and my father gave us long expositions of the disordered state of affairs in a country which had suffered so much as France, and lectured us severely on the folly of having expected to hear so soon. We knew, all the while, that the exposition was repeated to soothe his own impatience, and that the admonition to patience was what he felt that he himself was needing.

At last the letter came. There was a brave attempt at cheerfulness in it, which nearly made me cry, more than any complaints would have done. M. de Chalabre had hoped to retain his commission as sous-lieutenant in the Gardes du Corps—a commission signed by Louis the Sixteenth himself, in 1791. But the regiment was to be remodelled, or

reformed, I forget which; and M. de Chalabre assured us that his was not the only case where applicants had been refused. He had then tried for a commission in the Cent Suisses, the Gardes de la Porte, the Mousquetaires—but all were full. "Was it not a glorious thing for France to have so many brave sons ready to fight on the side of honour and loyalty?" To which question Fanny replied "That it was a shame!" and my father, after a grunt or two, comforted himself by saying, "That M. de Chalabre would have the more time to attend to his neglected estate."

That winter was full of incidents in our home. As it often happens when a family has seemed stationary, and secure from change for years, and then at last one important event happens, another is sure to follow. Fanny's lover returned, and they were married, and left us alone—my father and I. Her husband's ship was stationed in the Mediterranean, and she was to go and live at Malta, with some of his relations there. I know not if it was the agitation of parting with her, but my father was stricken down from health into confirmed invalidism, by a paralytic stroke, soon after her departure, and my interests were confined to the fluctuating reports of a sick-room. I did not care for the foreign intelligence which was shaking Europe with an universal tremor. My hopes, my fears were centred in one frail human body—my dearly beloved, my most loving father. I kept a letter in my pocket for days from M. de Chalabre, unable to find the time to decipher his French hieroglyphics; at last I read it aloud to my poor father, rather as a test of his power of enduring interest, than because I was impatient to know what it contained. The news in it was depressing enough, as everything else seemed to be that gloomy winter. A rich manufacturer of Rouen had bought the Château Chalabre; forfeited to the nation by its former possessor's emigration. His son, M. du Fay, was well-affected towards Louis the Eighteenth—at least as long as his government was secure and promised to be stable, so as not to affect the dyeing and selling of turkey-red wools; and so the natural

legal consequence was, that M. du Fay, Fils, was not to be disturbed in his purchased and paid-for property. My father cared to hear of this disappointment to our poor friend—cared just for one day, and forgot all about it the next. Then came the return from Elba—the hurrying events of that spring—the battle of Waterloo; and to my poor father, in his second childhood, the choice of a daily pudding was far more important than all.

One Sunday, in that August of 1815, I went to church. It was many weeks since I had been able to leave my father for so long a time before. Since I had been last there to worship, it seemed as if my youth had passed away—gone without a warning—leaving no trace behind. After service, I went through the long grass to the unfrequented part of the churchyard where my dear mother lay buried. A garland of brilliant yellow immortelles lay on her grave; and the unwonted offering took me by surprise. I knew of the foreign custom, although I had never seen the kind of wreath before. I took it up, and read one word in the black floral letters; it was simply "Adieu." I knew, from the first moment I saw it, that M. de Chalabre must have returned to England. Such a token of regard was like him, and could spring from no one else. But I wondered a little that we had never heard or seen anything of him; nothing, in fact, since Lady Ashburton had told me that her husband had met with him in Belgium, hurrying to offer himself as a volunteer to one of the eleven generals appointed by the Duc de Feltre to receive such applications. General Ashburton himself had since this died at Brussels, in consequence of wounds received at Waterloo. As the recollection of all these circumstances gathered in my mind, I found I was drawing near the field-path which led out of the direct road home, to Farmer Dobson's; and thither I suddenly determined to go, and hear if they had learnt anything respecting their former lodger. As I went up the garden-walk leading to the house, I caught M. de Chalabre's eye; he was gazing abstractedly out of the window of what used to be his sitting-

room. In an instant he had joined me in the garden. If my youth had flown, his youth, and middle-age as well, had vanished altogether. He looked older by at least twenty years than when he had left us twelve months ago. How much of this was owing to the change in the arrangement of his dress, I cannot tell. He had formerly been remarkably dainty in all these things; now he was careless, even to the verge of slovenliness. He asked after my sister, after my father, in a manner which evinced the deepest, most respectful interest; but, somehow, it appeared to me as if he hurried question after question, rather to stop any inquiries which I, in my turn, might wish to make.

"I return here to my duties; to my only duties. The good God has not seen me fit to undertake any higher. Henceforth I am the faithful French teacher; the diligent, punctual French teacher: nothing more. But I do hope to teach the French language as becomes a gentleman and a Christian; to do my best. Henceforth the grammar and the syntax are my estate, my coat of arms." He said this with a proud humility which prevented any reply. I could only change the subject, and urge him to come and see my poor sick father. He replied—

"To visit the sick, that is my duty as well as my pleasure. For the mere society—I renounce all that. That is now beyond my position, to which I accommodate myself with all my strength."

Accordingly, when he came to spend an hour with my father, he brought a small bundle of printed papers, announcing the terms on which M. Chalabre (the "de" was dropped now and for evermore) was desirous of teaching French, and a little paragraph at the bottom of the page solicited the patronage of schools. Now this was a great coming-down. In former days, non-teaching at schools had been the line which marked that M. de Chalabre had taken up teaching rather as an amateur profession than with any intention of devoting his life to it. He respectfully asked me to distribute these papers where I thought fit. I say

"respectfully" advisedly; there was none of the old deferential gallantry, as offered by a gentleman to a lady, his equal in birth and fortune—instead, there was the matter-of-fact request and statement which a workman offers to his employer. Only in my father's room he was the former M. de Chalabre; he seemed to understand how vain would be all attempts to recount or explain the circumstances which had led him so decidedly to take a lower level in society. To my father, to the day of his death, M. de Chalabre maintained the old easy footing; assumed a gaiety which he never even pretended to feel anywhere else; listened to my father's childish interests with a true and kindly sympathy for which I ever felt grateful, although he purposely put a deferential reserve between him and me, as a barrier to any expression of such feeling on my part.

His former lessons had been held in such high esteem by those who were privileged to receive them, that he was soon sought after on all sides. The schools of the two principal county towns put forward their claims, and considered it a favour to receive his instructions; morning, noon, and night, he was engaged; even if he had not proudly withdrawn himself from all merely society engagements, he would have had no leisure for them. His only visits were paid to my father, who looked for them with a kind of childish longing. One day, to my surprise, he asked to be allowed to speak to me for an instant alone. He stood silent for a moment, turning his hat in his hand.

"You have a right to know—you, my first pupil; next Tuesday, I marry myself to Miss Susan Dobson—good, respectable woman, to whose happiness I mean to devote my life, or as much of it as is not occupied with the duties of instruction." He looked up at me, expecting congratulations, perhaps; but I was too much stunned with my surprise; the buxom, red-armed, apple-cheeked Susan, who, when she blushed, blushed the colour of beet-root; who did not know a word of French; who regarded the nation (always excepting the gentleman before me) as frog-eating Mounseers, the

national enemies of England! I afterwards thought that perhaps this very ignorance constituted one of her charms. No word, nor allusion, nor expressive silence, nor regretful sympathetic sighs, could remind M. de Chalabre of the bitter past, which he was evidently striving to forget. And, most assuredly, never man had a more devoted and admiring wife than poor Susan made M. de Chalabre. She was a little awed by him, to be sure; never quite at her ease before him; but I imagine husbands do not dislike such a tribute to their Jupiter-ship. Madame Chalabre received my call, after their marriage, with a degree of sober, rustic, happy dignity, which I could not have foreseen in Susan Dobson. They had taken a small cottage on the borders of the forest; it had a garden round it; and the cow, pigs, and poultry, which were to be her charge, found their keep in the forest. She had a rough country servant to assist her in looking after them; and in what scanty leisure he had, her husband attended to the garden and the bees. Madame Chalabre took me over the neatly-furnished cottage with evident pride. "Moussire," as she called him, had done this; Moussire had fitted up that. Moussire was evidently a man of resource. In a little closet of a dressing-room belonging to Moussire, there hung a pencil drawing, elaborately finished to the condition of a bad pocket-book engraving. It caught my eye, and I lingered to look at it. It represented a high, narrow house, of considerable size, with four pepper-box turrets at each corner; and a stiff avenue formed the foreground.

"Château Chalabre?" said I inquisitively.

"I never asked," my companion replied. "Moussire does not always like to be asked questions. It is the picture of some place he is very fond of, for he won't let me dust it for fear I should smear it."

M. de Chalabre's marriage did not diminish the number of his visits to my father. Until that beloved parent's death, he was faithful in doing all he could to lighten the gloom of the sick-room. But a chasm, which he had opened, separated any present intercourse with him from the free,

unreserved friendship that had existed formerly. And yet for his sake I used to go and see his wife. I could not forget early days, nor the walks to the top of the clover-field, nor the daily posies, nor my mother's dear regard for the emigrant gentleman; nor a thousand little kindnesses which he had shown to my absent sister and myself. He did not forget either in the closed and sealed chambers of his heart. So for his sake, I tried to become a friend to his wife; and she learned to look upon me as such. It was my employment in the sick chamber to make clothes for the little expected Chalabre baby; and its mother would fain (as she told me) have asked me to carry the little infant to the font, but that her husband somewhat austerely reminded her that they ought to seek a *marraine* among those of their own station in society. But I regarded the pretty little Susan as my god-child nevertheless in my heart; and secretly pledged myself always to take an interest in her. Not two months after my father's death, a sister was born; and the human heart in M. de Chalabre subdued his pride; the child was to bear the pretty name of his French mother, although France could find no place for him and had cast him out. That youngest little girl was called Aimée.

When my father died, Fanny and her husband urged me to leave Brookfield, and come and live with them at Valetta. The estate was left to us; but an eligible tenant offered himself; and my health, which had suffered materially during my long nursing, did render it desirable for me to seek some change to a warmer climate. So I went abroad, ostensibly for a year's residence only; but, somehow, that year has grown into a lifetime. Malta and Genoa have been my dwelling-places ever since. Occasionally, it is true, I have paid visits to England, but I have never looked upon it as my home since I left it thirty years ago. During these visits I have seen the Chalabres. He had become more absorbed in his occupation than ever; had published a French grammar on some new principle, of which he presented me with a copy, taking some pains to explain how

it was to be used. Madame looked plump and prosperous; the farm, which was under her management, had thriven; and as for the two daughters, behind their English shyness, they had a good deal of French piquancy and *esprit*. I induced them to take some walks with me, with a view of asking them some questions which should make our friendship an individual reality, not merely an hereditary feeling; but the little monkeys put me through my catechism, and asked me innumerable questions about France, which they evidently regarded as their country. "How do you know all about French habits and customs?" asked I. "Does Monsieur de—does your father talk to you much about France?"

"Sometimes, when we are alone with him—never when any one is by," answered Susan, the elder, a grave, noble-looking girl, of twenty or thereabouts. "I think he does not speak about France before my mother, for fear of hurting her."

"And I think," said little Aimée, "that he does not speak at all, when he can help it; it is only when his heart gets too full with recollections that he is obliged to talk to us, because many of the thoughts could not be said in English."

"Then, I suppose, you are two famous French scholars?"

"Oh, yes! Papa always speaks to us in French; it is our own language."

But with all their devotion to their father and to his country they were most affectionate, dutiful daughters to their mother. They were her companions, her comforts in the pleasant household labours; most practical, useful young women. But in a privacy not the less sacred, because it was understood rather than prescribed, they kept all the enthusiasm, all the romance of their nature, for their father. They were the confidantes of that poor exile's yearnings for France; the eager listeners for what he chose to tell them of his early days. His words wrought up Susan to make the resolution that, if ever she felt herself free from home duties and responsibilities, she would become a Sister of

Charity, like Anne-Marguérite de Chalabre, her father's great-aunt, and model of woman's sancity. As for Aimée, come what might, she never would leave her father; and that was all she was clear about in picturing her future.

Three years ago I was in Paris. An English friend of mine who lives there—English by birth, but married to a German professor, and very French in manners and ways—asked me to come to her house one evening. I was far from well, and disinclined to stir out.

"Oh, but come!" said she. "I have a good reason; really a tempting reason. Perhaps this very evening a piece of poetical justice will be done in my *salon*. A living romance! Now, can you resist?"

"What is it?" said I; for she was rather in the habit of exaggerating trifles into romances.

"A young lady is coming; not in the first youth, but still young, very pretty; daughter of a French *émigré*, whom my husband knew in Belgium, and who has lived in England ever since."

"I beg your pardon, but what is her name?" interrupted I, roused to interest.

"De Chalabre. Do you know her?"

"Yes; I am much interested in her. I will gladly come to meet her. How long has she been in Paris? Is it Susan or Aimée?"

"Now, I am not to be baulked of the pleasure of telling you my romance; my hoped-for bit of poetical justice. You must be patient, and you will have answers to all your questions."

I sank back in my easy-chair. Some of my friends are rather long-winded, and it is as well to be settled in a comfortable position before they begin to talk.

"I told you a minute ago, that my husband had become acquainted with M. de Chalabre in Belgium, in 1815. They have kept up a correspondence ever since; not a very brisk one, it is true, for M. de Chalabre was a French master in England, and my husband a professor in Paris; but still

they managed to let each other know how they were going on, and what they were doing, once, if not twice every year. For myself, I never saw M. de Chalabre."

"I know him well," said I. "I have known him all my life."

"A year ago his wife died (she was an Englishwoman); she had had a long and suffering illness; and his eldest daughter had devoted herself to her with the patient sweetness of an angel, as he told us, and I can well believe. But after her mother's death, the world, it seems, became distasteful to her: she had been inured to the half-lights, the hushed voices, the constant thought for others required in a sick-room, and the noise and rough bustle of healthy people jarred upon her. So she pleaded with her father to allow her to become a Sister of Charity. She told him that he would have given a welcome to any suitor who came to offer to marry her, and bear her away from her home, and her father and sister; and now, when she was called by religion, would he grudge to part with her? He gave his consent, if not his full approbation; and he wrote to my husband to beg me to receive her here, while we sought out a convent into which she could be received. She has been with me two months, and endeared herself to me unspeakably; she goes home next week, unless——"

"But I beg your pardon; did you not say she wished to become a Sister of Charity?"

"It is true; but she was too old to be admitted into their order. She is eight-and-twenty. It has been a grievous disappointment to her; she has borne it very patiently and meekly, but I can see how deeply she has felt it. And now for my romance. My husband had a pupil some ten years ago, a M. du Fay, a clever, scientific young man, one of the first merchants of Rouen. His grandfather purchased M. de Chalabre's ancestral estate. The present M. du Fay came on business to Paris two or three days ago, and invited my husband to a little dinner; and somehow this story of Suzette Chalabre came out, in consequence of inquiries my husband

was making for an escort to take her to England. M. du Fay seemed interested with the story; and asked my husband if he might pay his respects to me, some evening when Suzette should be in,—and so is coming to-night, he, and a friend of his, who was at the dinner-party the other day; will you come?"

I went, more in the hope of seeing Susan Chalabre, and hearing some news about my early home, than with any expectation of "poetical justice." And in that I was right; and yet I was wrong. Susan Chalabre was a grave, gentle woman, of an enthusiastic and devoted appearance, not unlike that portrait of his daughter which arrests every eye in Ary Scheffer's sacred pictures. She was silent and sad; her cherished plan of life was uprooted. She talked to me a little in a soft and friendly manner, answering any questions I asked; but, as for gentlemen, her indifference and reserve made it impossible for them to enter into any conversation with her; and the meeting was indisputably "flat."

"Oh! my romance! my poetical justice! Before the evening was half over, I would have given up all my castles in the air for one well-sustained conversation of ten minutes long. Now don't laugh at me, for I can't bear it to-night." Such was my friend's parting speech. I did not see her again for two days. The third she came in glowing with excitement.

"You may congratulate me, after all; if it was not poetical justice, it is prosaic justice; and except for the empty romance, that is a better thing!"

"What do you mean?" said I. "Surely M. du Fay has not proposed for Susan?"

"No! but that charming M. de Frez, his friend, has; that is to say, not proposed but spoken; no, not spoken, but it seems he asked M. du Fay—whose confidant he was—if he was intending to proceed in his idea of marrying Suzette; and on hearing that he was not, M. de Frez said that he should come to us, and ask us to put him in the way of prosecuting the acquaintance, for that he had been charmed

with her; looks, voice, silence, he admires them all; and we have arranged that he is to be the escort to England; he has business there, he says; and as for Suzette (she knows nothing of all this, of course, for who dared tell her?) all her anxiety is to return home, and the first person travelling to England will satisfy her, if it does us. And, after all, M. de Frez lives within five leagues of the Château Chalabre, so she can go and see the old place whenever she will."

When I went to bid Susan good-bye, she looked as unconscious and dignified as ever. No idea of a lover had ever crossed her mind. She considered M. de Frez as a kind of necessary incumbrance for the journey. I had not much hopes for him; and yet he was an agreeable man enough, and my friends told me that his character stood firm and high.

In three months, I was settled for the winter in Rome. In four, I heard that the marriage of Susan Chalabre had taken place. What were the intermediate steps between the cold, civil indifference with which I had last seen her regarding her travelling companion, and the full love with which such a woman as Suzette Chalabre must love a man before she could call him husband, I never learnt. I wrote to my old French master to congratulate him, as I believed I honestly might, on his daughter's marriage. It was some months before I received his answer. It was—

"Dear friend, dear old pupil, dear child of the beloved dead, I am an old man of eighty, and I tremble towards the grave. I cannot write many words; but my own hand shall bid you come to the home of Aimée and her husband. They tell me to ask you to come and see the old father's birthplace while he is yet alive to show it to you. I have the very apartment in Château Chalabre that was mine when I was a boy, and my mother came in to bless me every night. Susan lives near us. The good God bless my sons-in-law, Bertrand de Frez and Alphonse du Fay, as He has blest me all my life long. I think of your father and mother, my dear; and you must think no harm when I tell you I have

had masses said for the repose of their souls. If I make a mistake, God will forgive."

My heart could have interpreted this letter, even without the pretty letter of Aimée and her husband which accompanied it; and which told how, when M. du Fay came over to his friend's wedding, he had seen the younger sister, and in her seen his fate. The soft, caressing, timid Aimée was more to his taste than the grave and stately Susan. Yet little Aimée managed to rule imperiously at Château Chalabre; or, rather, her husband was delighted to indulge her every wish; while Susan, in her grand way, made rather a pomp of her conjugal obedience. But they were both good wives, good daughters.

This last summer you might have seen an old, old man, dressed in grey, with white flowers in his button-hole (gathered by a grandchild as fair as they), leading an elderly lady about the grounds of Château Chalabre, with tottering, unsteady eagerness of gait.

"Here!" said he to me, "just here my mother bade me adieu when first I went to join my regiment. I was impatient to go. I mounted—I rode to yonder great chestnut, and then, looking back, I saw my mother's sorrowful countenance. I sprang off, threw the reins to the groom, and ran back for one more embrace. 'My brave boy!' she said; 'my own! Be faithful to God and your king!' I never saw her more; but I shall see her soon; and I think I may tell her I have been faithful both to my God and my king."

Before now he has told his mother all.

THE SQUIRE'S STORY

In the year 1769, the little town of Barford was thrown into a state of great excitement by the intelligence that a gentleman (and "quite the gentleman," said the landlord of the "George Inn"), had been looking at Mr. Clavering's old house. This house was neither in the town nor in the country. It stood on the outskirts of Barford, on the roadside leading to Derby. The last occupant had been a Mr. Clavering—a Northumberland gentleman of good family—who had come to live in Barford while he was but a younger son; but when some elder branches of the family died, he had returned to take possession of the family estate. The house of which I speak was called the White House, from its being covered with a greyish kind of stucco. It had a good garden to the back, and Mr. Clavering had built capital stables with what were then considered the latest improvements. The point of good stabling was expected to let the house, as it was in a hunting county; otherwise it had few recommendations. There were many bedrooms; some entered through others, even to the number of five, leading one beyond the other; several sitting-rooms of the small and poky kind, wainscotted round with wood, and then painted a heavy slate colour; one good dining-room, and a drawing-room over it, both looking into the garden, with pleasant bow-windows.

Such was the accommodation offered by the White House. It did not seem to be very tempting to strangers, though the good people of Barford rather piqued themselves on it as the largest house in the town, and as a house in which "townspeople" and "county people" had often met

at Mr. Clavering's friendly dinners. To appreciate this circumstance of pleasant recollection, you should have lived some years in a little country town, surrounded by gentlemen's seats. You would then understand how a bow or a courtesy from a member of a county family elevates the individuals who receive it almost as much, in their own eyes, as the pair of blue garters fringed with silver did Mr. Bickerstaff's ward. They trip lightly on air for a whole day afterwards. Now Mr. Clavering was gone, where could town and county mingle?

I mention these things that you may have an idea of the desirability of the letting of the White House in the Barfordites' imagination; and, to make the mixture thick and slab, you must add for yourselves the bustle, the mystery, and the importance which every little event either causes or assumes in a small town, and then perhaps it will be no wonder to you that twenty ragged little urchins accompanied the "gentleman" aforesaid to the door of the White House; and that, although he was above an hour inspecting it, under the auspices of Mr. Jones, the agent's clerk, thirty more had joined themselves on to the wondering crowd before his exit, and awaited such crumbs of intelligence as they could gather before they were threatened or whipped out of hearing distance. Presently, out came the "gentleman" and the lawyer's clerk. The latter was speaking as he followed the former over the threshold. The gentleman was tall, well-dressed, handsome; but there was a sinister cold look in his quick-glancing, light blue eye, which a keen observer might not have liked. There were no keen observers among the boys and ill-conditioned gaping girls. But they stood too near, inconveniently close; and the gentleman, lifting up his right hand, in which he carried a short riding-whip, dealt one or two sharp blows to the nearest, with a look of savage enjoyment on his face as they moved away, whimpering and crying. An instant after, his expression of countenance had changed.

"Here," said he, drawing out a handful of money, partly

silver, partly copper, and throwing it into the midst of them. "Scramble for it! fight it out, my lads! come this afternoon, at three, to the 'George,' and I'll throw you out some more." So the boys hurrahed for him as he walked off with the agent's clerk. He chuckled to himself, as over a pleasant thought. "I'll have some fun with those lads," he said; "I'll teach 'em to come prowling and prying about me. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make the money so hot in the fire-shovel that it shall burn their fingers. You come and see the faces and the howling. I shall be very glad if you will dine with me at two; and by that time I may have made up my mind respecting the house."

Mr. Jones, the agent's clerk, agreed to come to the "George" at two, but somehow he had a distaste for his entertainer. Mr. Jones would not like to have said, even to himself, that a man with a purse full of money, who kept many horses, and spoke familiarly of noblemen—above all, who thought of taking the White House—could be anything but a gentleman; but still the uneasy wonder as to who this Mr. Robinson Higgins could be, filled the clerk's mind long after Mr. Higgins, Mr. Higgins's servants, and Mr. Higgins's stud had taken possession of the White House.

The White House was re-stuccoed (this time of a pale yellow colour) and put into thorough repair by the accommodating and delighted landlord, while his tenant seemed inclined to spend any amount of money on internal decoraations, which were showy and effective in their character, enough to make the White House a nine day's wonder to the good people of Barford. The slate-coloured paints became pink, and were picked out with gold; the old-fashioned banisters were replaced by newly gilt ones; but, above all, the stables were a sight to be seen. Since the days of the Roman emperor, never was there such provision made for the care, the comfort, and the health of horses. But every one said it was no wonder, when they were led through Barford, covered up to their eyes, but curving their arched and delicate necks, and prancing with short, high

steps, in repressed eagerness. Only one groom came with them; yet they required the care of three men. Mr. Higgins, however, preferred engaging two lads out of Barford; and Barford highly approved of his preference. Not only was it kind and thoughtful to give employment to the lounging lads themselves, but they were receiving such a training in Mr. Higgins's stable as might fit them for Doncaster or Newmarket. The district of Derbyshire in which Barford was situated was too close to Leicestershire not to support a hunt and a pack of hounds. The master of the hounds was a certain Sir Harry Manley, who was *aut* a huntsman *aut nullus*. He measured a man by the "length of his fork," not by the expression of his countenance, or the shape of his head. But, as Sir Harry was wont to observe, there was such a thing as too long a fork; so his approbation was withheld until he had seen a man on horseback; and, if his seat there was square and easy, his hand light, and his courage good, Sir Harry hailed him as a brother.

Mr. Higgins attended the first meet of the season, not as a subscriber, but as an amateur. The Barford huntsmen piqued themselves on their bold riding, and their knowledge of the country came by nature; yet this new strange man, whom nobody knew, was in at the death, sitting on his horse, both well-breathed and calm, without a hair turned on the sleek skin of the latter, supremely addressing the old huntsman as he hacked off the tail of the fox; and he, the old man, who was testy even under Sir Harry's slightest rebuke, and flew out on any other member of the hunt that dared to utter a word against his sixty years' experience as stable-boy, groom, poacher, and what not—he, old Isaac Wormeley, was meekly listening to the wisdom of this stranger, only now and then giving one of his quick, up-turning, cunning glances, not unlike the sharp, o'er-canny looks of the poor deceased Reynard, round whom the hounds were howling, unadmonished by the short whip which was now tucked into Wormeley's well-worn pocket. When Sir Harry rode into the copse—full of dead brushwood and wet tangled grass—

and was followed by the members of the hunt, as one by one they cantered past, Mr. Higgins took off his cap and bowed —half-deferentially, half-insolently—with a lurking smile in the corner of his eye at the discomfited looks of one or two of the laggards. "A famous run, sir," said Sir Harry. "The first time you have hunted in our country; but I hope we shall see you often."

"I hope to become a member of the hunt, sir," said Mr. Higgins.

"Most happy—proud, I am sure, to receive so daring a rider among us. You took the Cropper-gate, I fancy, while some of our friends here"—scowling at one or two cowards by way of finishing his speech. "Allow me to introduce myself—master of the hounds." He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for the card on which his name was formally inscribed. "Some of our friends here are kind enough to come home with me to dinner; might I ask for the honour?"

"My name is Higgins," replied the stranger, bowing low. "I am only lately come to occupy the White House at Barford, and I have not as yet presented my letters of introduction."

"Hang it!" replied Sir Harry; "a man with a seat like yours, and that good brush in your hand, might ride up to any door in the county (I'm a Leicestershire man!), and be a welcome guest. Mr. Higgins, I shall be proud to become better acquainted with you over my dinner-table."

Mr. Higgins knew pretty well how to improve the acquaintance thus begun. He could sing a good song, tell a good story, and was well up in practical jokes; with plenty of that keen, worldly sense, which seems like an instinct in some men, and which in this case taught him on whom he might play off such jokes, with impunity from their resentment, and with a security of applause from the more boisterous, vehement, or prosperous. At the end of twelve months Mr. Robinson Higgins was, out-and-out, the most popular member of the Barford hunt; had beaten all the

others by a couple of lengths, as his first patron, Sir Harry, observed one evening, when they were just leaving the dinner-table of an old hunting squire in the neighbourhood.

"Because, you know," said Squire Hearn, holding Sir Harry by the button—"I mean, you see, this young spark is looking sweet upon Catherine; and she's a good girl, and will have ten thousand pounds down, the day she's married, by her mother's will; and, excuse me, Sir Harry, but I should not like my girl to throw herself away."

Though Sir Harry had a long ride before him, and but the early and short light of a new moon to take it in, his kind heart was so much touched by Squire Hearn's trembling, tearful anxiety, that he stopped and turned back into the dining-room to say, with more asseverations than I care to give—

"My good squire, I may say, I know that man pretty well by this time; and a better fellow never existed. If I had twenty daughters, he should have the pick of them."

Squire Hearn never thought of asking the grounds for his old friend's opinion of Mr. Higgins; it had been given with too much earnestness for any doubts to cross the old man's mind as to the possibility of its not being well founded. Mr. Hearn was not a doubter, or a thinker, or suspicious by nature; it was simply his love for Catherine, his only child, that prompted his anxiety in this case; and, after what Sir Harry had said, the old man could totter with an easy mind, though not with very steady legs, into the drawing-room, where his bonny, blushing daughter Catherine and Mr. Higgins stood close together on the hearth-rug: he whispering, she listening with downcast eyes. She looked so happy, so like her dead mother had looked when the squire was a young man, that all his thought was how to please her most. His son and heir was about to be married, and bring his wife to live with the squire; Barford and the White House were not distant an hour's ride; and, even as these thoughts passed through his mind, he asked Mr. Higgins if he could not stay all night—the young moon was already set—the

roads would be dark—and Catherine looked up with a pretty anxiety, which, however, had not much doubt in it, for the answer.

With every encouragement of this kind from the old squire, it took everybody rather by surprise when, one morning, it was discovered that Miss Catherine Hearn was missing; and when, according to the usual fashion in such cases, a note was found, saying that she had eloped with "the man of her heart," and gone to Gretna Green, no one could imagine why she could not quietly have stopped at home and been married in the parish church. She had always been a romantic, sentimental girl; very pretty and very affectionate, and very much spoilt, and very much wanting in common sense. Her indulgent father was deeply hurt at this want of confidence in his never-varying affection; but when his son came, hot with indignation, from the baronet's (his future father-in-law's house, where every form of law and of ceremony was to accompany his own impending marriage), Squire Hearn pleaded the cause of the young couple with imploring cogency, and protested that it was a piece of spirit in his daughter, which he admired and was proud of. However, it ended with Mr. Nathaniel Hearn's declaring that he and his wife would have nothing to do with his sister and her husband. "Wait till you've seen him, Nat!" said the old squire, trembling with his distressful anticipations of family discord. "He's an excuse for any girl. Only ask Sir Harry's opinion of him."—"Confound Sir Harry! So that a man sits his horse well, Sir Harry cares nothing about anything else. Who is this man—this fellow! Where does he come from? What are his means? Who are his family?"

"He comes from the South—Surrey or Somersetshire, I forget which; and he pays his way well and liberally. There's not a tradesman in Barford but says he cares no more for money than for water; he spends like a prince, Nat. I don't know who his family are; but he seals with a coat of arms, which may tell you if you want to know; and

he goes regularly to collect his rents from his estates in the South. Oh, Nat! if you would but be friendly, I should be as well pleased with Kitty's marriage as any father in the county."

Mr. Nathaniel Hearn gloomed, and muttered an oath or two to himself. The poor old father was reaping the consequences of his weak indulgence to his two children. Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Hearn kept apart from Catherine and her husband; and Squire Hearn durst never ask them to Levison Hall, though it was his own house. Indeed, he stole away as if he were a culprit, whenever he went to visit the White House; and if he passed a night there he was fain to equivocate when he returned home the next day: an equivocation which was well interpreted by the surly, proud Nathaniel. But the younger Mr. and Mrs. Hearn were the only people who did not visit at the White House. Mr. and Mrs. Higgins were decidedly more popular than their brother and sister-in-law. She made a very pretty, sweet-tempered hostess, and her education had not been such as to make her intolerant of any want of refinement in the associates who gathered round her husband. She had gentle smiles for townspeople as well as county people, and unconsciously played an admirable second in her husband's project of making himself universally popular.

But there is some one to make ill-natured remarks, and draw ill-natured conclusions from very simple premises, in every place; and in Barford this bird of ill-omen was a Miss Pratt. She did not hunt—so Mr. Higgins's admirable riding did not call out her admiration. She did not drink—so the well-selected wines, so lavishly dispensed among his guests, could never mollify Miss Pratt. She could not bear comic songs, or buffo stories—so, in that way, her approbation was impregnable. And these three secrets of popularity constituted Mr. Higgins's great charm. Miss Pratt sat and watched. Her face looked immovably grave at the end of any of Mr. Higgins's best stories; but there was a keen, needle-like glance of her unwinking little eyes, which Mr.

Higgins felt rather than saw, and which made him shiver, even on a hot day, when it fell upon him. Miss Pratt was a Dissenter; and, to propitiate this female Mordecai, Mr. Higgins asked the Dissenting minister whose services she attended to dinner; kept himself and his company in good order; gave a handsome donation to the poor of the chapel. All in vain—Miss Pratt stirred not a muscle more of her face towards graciousness; and Mr. Higgins was conscious that, in spite of all his open efforts to captivate Mr. Davis, there was a secret influence on the other side, throwing in doubts and suspicions, and evil interpretations of all he said or did. Miss Pratt, the little, plain old maid, living on eighty pounds a year, was the thorn in the popular Mr. Higgins's side, although she had never spoken one uncivil word to him; indeed, on the contrary, had treated him with a stiff and elaborate civility.

The thorn—the grief to Mrs. Higgins was this. They had no children! Oh! how she would stand and envy the careless, busy motion of half-a-dozen children, and then, when observed, move on with a deep, deep sigh of yearning regret! But it was as well.

It was noticed that Mr. Higgins was remarkably careful of his health. He ate, drank, took exercise, rested, by some secret rules of his own; occasionally bursting into an excess, it is true, but only on rare occasions—such as when he returned from visiting his estates in the South, and collecting his rents. That unusual exertion and fatigue—for there were no stage coaches within forty miles of Barford, and he, like most country gentlemen of that day, would have preferred riding if there had been—seemed to require some strange excess to compensate for it; and rumours went through the town that he shut himself up, and drank enormously for some days after his return. But no one was admitted to these orgies.

One day—they remembered it well afterwards—the hounds met not far from the town; and the fox was found in a part of the wild heath, which was beginning to be

enclosed by a few of the more wealthy townspeople, who were desirous of building themselves houses rather more in the country than those they had hitherto lived in. Among these, the principal was a Mr. Dudgeon, the attorney of Barford, and the agent for all the county families about. The firm of Dudgeon had managed the leases, the marriage settlements, and the wills of the neighbourhood for generations. Mr. Dudgeon's father had the responsibility of collecting the landowners' rents, just as the present Mr. Dudgeon had at the time of which I speak; and as his son and his son's son have done since. Their business was an hereditary estate to them; and with something of the old feudal feeling was mixed a kind of proud humility at their position towards the squires whose family secrets they had mastered, and the mysteries of whose fortunes and estates were better known to the Messrs. Dudgeon than to themselves.

Mr. John Dudgeon had built himself a house on Wildbury Heath—a mere cottage, as he called it; but, though only two storeys high, it spread out far and wide, and work-people from Derby had been sent for on purpose to make the inside as complete as possible. The gardens, too, were exquisite in arrangement, if not very extensive; and not a flower was grown in them but of the rarest species. It must have been somewhat of a mortification to the owner of this dainty place when, on the day of which I speak, the fox, after a long race, during which he had described a circle of many miles, took refuge in the garden; but Mr. Dudgeon put a good face on the matter when a gentleman hunter, with the careless insolence of the squires of those days and that place, rode across the velvet lawn, and tapping at the window of the dining-room with his whip-handle, asked permission—no, that is not it!—rather, informed Mr. Dudgeon of their intention—to enter his garden in a body and have the fox unearthed. Mr. Dudgeon compelled himself to smile assent, with the grace of a masculine Griselda; and then he hastily gave orders to have all that the house afforded of provision

set out for luncheon, guessing rightly enough that a six hours' run would give even homely fare an acceptable welcome. He bore without wincing the entrance of the dirty boots into his exquisitely clean rooms; he only felt grateful for the care with which Mr. Higgins strode about, laboriously and noiselessly moving on the tip of his toes, as he reconnoitered the rooms with a curious eye.

"I'm going to build a house myself, Dudgeon; and, upon my word, I don't think I could take a better model than yours."

"Oh! my poor cottage would be too small to afford any hints for such a house as you would wish to build, Mr. Higgins," replied Mr. Dudgeon, gently rubbing his hands nevertheless at the compliment.

"Not at all! not at all! Let me see. You have dining-room, drawing-room"—he hesitated, and Mr. Dudgeon filled up the blank, as he expected.

"Four sitting-rooms and the bedrooms. But allow me to show you over the house. I confess, I took some pains in arranging it; and, though far smaller than what you would require, it may, nevertheless, afford you some hints."

So they left the eating gentlemen with their mouths and their plates quite full, and the scent of the fox overpowering that of the hasty rashers of ham, and they carefully inspected all the ground-floor rooms. Then Mr. Dudgeon said—

"If you are not tired, Mr. Higgins—it is rather my hobby, so you must pull me up if you are—we will go upstairs, and I will show you my sanctum."

Mr. Dudgeon's sanctum was the centre room over the porch, which formed a balcony, and which was carefully filled with choice flowers in pots. Inside there were all kinds of elegant contrivances for hiding the real strength of all the boxes and chests required by the particular nature of Mr. Dudgeon's business; for, although his office was in Barford, he kept (as he informed Mr. Higgins) what was the most valuable here, as being safer than an office which was locked up and left every night. But, as Mr. Higgins

reminded him with a sly poke in the side, when next they met, his own house was not over-secure. A fortnight after the gentlemen of the Barford hunt lunched there, Mr. Dudgeon's strong box—in his sanctum upstairs, with the mysterious spring-bolt to the window invented by himself, and the secret of which was only known to the inventor and a few of his most intimate friends, to whom he had proudly shown it—this strong box, containing the collected Christmas rents of half-a-dozen landlords (there was then no bank nearer than Derby), was rifled, and the secretly rich Mr. Dudgeon had to stop his agent in his purchases of paintings by Flemish artists because the money was required to make good the missing rents.

The Dogberries and Verges of those days were quite incapable of obtaining any clue to the robber or robbers; and, though one or two vagrants were taken up and brought before Mr. Dunover and Mr. Higgins, the magistrates who usually attended in the court-room at Barford, there was no evidence brought against them, and after a couple of nights' durance in the lock-ups they were set at liberty. But it became a standing joke with Mr. Higgins to ask Mr. Dudgeon, from time to time, whether he could recommend him a place of safety for his valuables, or if he had made any more inventions lately for securing houses from robbers.

About two years after this time—about seven years after Mr. Higgins had been married—one Tuesday evening, Mr. Davis was sitting reading the news in the coffee-room of the "George Inn." He belonged to a club of gentlemen who met there occasionally to play at whist, to read what few newspapers and magazines were published in those days, to chat about the market at Derby, and prices all over the country. This Tuesday night it was a black frost, and few people were in the room. Mr. Davis was anxious to finish an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*; indeed, he was making extracts from it, intending to answer it, and yet unable with his small income to purchase a copy. So he stayed late; it was past nine, and at ten o'clock the room was closed. But

while he wrote, Mr. Higgins came in. He was pale and haggard with cold. Mr. Davis, who had had for some time sole possession of the fire, moved politely on one side, and handed to the new-comer the sole London newspaper which the room afforded. Mr. Higgins accepted it, and made some remark on the intense coldness of the weather; but Mr. Davis was too full of his article and intended reply to fall into conversation readily. Mr. Higgins hitched his chair nearer to the fire, and put his feet on the fender, giving an audible shudder. He put the newspaper on one end of the table near him and sat gazing into the red embers of the fire, crouching down over them as if his very marrow was chilled. At length he said—

"There is no account of the murder at Bath in that paper?" Mr. Davis, who had finished taking his notes, and was preparing to go, stopped short, and asked—

"Has there been a murder at Bath? No! I have not seen anything of it—who was murdered?"

"Oh! it was a shocking, terrible murder!" said Mr. Higgins, not raising his look from the fire, but gazing on with his eyes dilated till the whites were seen all round them. "A terrible, terrible murder! I wonder what will become of the murderer? I can fancy the red glowing centre of that fire—look and see how infinitely distant it seems, and how the distance magnifies it into something awful and unquenchable."

"My dear sir, you are feverish: how you shake and shiver!" said Mr. Davis, thinking, privately, that his companion had symptoms of fever, and that he was wandering in his mind.

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Higgins. "I am not feverish. It is the night which is so cold." And for a time he talked with Mr. Davis about the article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*; for he was rather a reader himself, and could take more interest in Mr. Davis's pursuits than most of the people at Barford. At length it drew near to ten, and Mr. Davis rose up to go home to his lodgings.

"No, Davis, don't go. I want you here. We will have a bottle of port together, and that will put Saunders into good humour. I want to tell you about this murder," he continued, dropping his voice, and speaking hoarse and low. "She was an old woman; and he killed her, sitting reading her Bible by her own fireside?" He looked at Mr. Davis with a strange, searching gaze, as if trying to find some sympathy in the horror which the idea presented to him.

"Whom do you mean, my dear sir? What is this murder you are so full of? No one has been murdered here."

"No, you fool! I tell you it was in Bath!" said Mr. Higgins, with sudden passion; and then, calming himself to most velvet-smoothness of manner, he laid his hand on Mr. Davis's knee, there, as they sat by the fire, and gently detaining him, began the narration of the crime he was so full of; but his voice and manner were constrained to a stony quietude: he never looked in Mr. Davis's face; once or twice, as Mr. Davis remembered afterwards, his grip tightened like a compressing vice.

"She lived in a small house in a quiet, old-fashioned street, she and her maid. People said she was a good old woman; but, for all that, she hoarded and hoarded, and never gave to the poor. Mr. Davis, it is wicked not to give to the poor—wicked—wicked, is it not? I always give to the poor, for once I read in the Bible that 'Charity covereth a multitude of sins.' The wicked old woman never gave, but hoarded her money, and saved and saved. Some one heard of it; I say she threw a temptation in his way, and God will punish her for it. And this man—or it might be a woman, who knows—and this person heard also that she went to church in the mornings and her maid in the afternoons; and so, while the maid was at church, and the street and the house quite still, and the darkness of a winter afternoon coming on, she was nodding over her Bible—and that, mark you! is a sin, and one that God will avenge

sooner or later—and a step came, in the dusk, up the stair, and that person I told you of stood in the room. At first, he—no! At first, it is supposed—for, you understand, all this is mere guess-work—it is supposed that he asked her civilly enough to give him her money, or to tell him where it was; but the old miser defied him, and would not ask for mercy and give up her keys, even when he threatened her, but looked him in the face as if he had been a baby. Oh, God! Mr. Davis, I once dreamt, when I was a little, innocent boy, that I should commit a crime like this, and I wakened up crying; and my mother comforted me—that is the reason I tremble so now—that and the cold, for it is very, very cold!"

"But did he murder the old lady?" asked Mr. Davis; "I beg your pardon, sir, but I am interested by your story."

"Yes, he cut her throat; and there she lies yet, in her quiet little parlour, with her face upturned and all ghastly white, in the middle of a pool of blood. Mr. Davis, this wine is no better than water; I must have some brandy."

Mr. Davis was horror-struck by the story, which seemed to have fascinated him as much as it had done his companion.

"Have they got any clue to the murderer?" said he. Mr. Higgins drank down half a tumbler of raw brandy before he answered.

"No; no clue whatever. They will never be able to discover him; and I should not wonder, Mr. Davis—I should not wonder if he repented after all, and did bitter penance for his crime; and if so—will there be mercy for him at the last day?"

"God knows!" said Mr. Davis, with solemnity. "It is an awful story," continued he, rousing himself; "I hardly like to leave this warm, light room and go out into the darkness after hearing it. But it must be done"—buttoning on his great-coat—"I can only say I hope and trust they will find out the murderer and hang him. If you'll take my

advice, Mr. Higgins, you'll have your bed warmed and drink a treacle posset just the last thing; and, if you'll allow me, I'll send you my answer to Philologus before it goes up to old Urban."

The next morning Mr. Davis went to call on Miss Pratt, who was not very well, and, by way of being agreeable and entertaining, he related to her all he had heard the night before about the murder at Bath; and really he made a very pretty connected story out of it, and interested Miss Pratt very much in the fate of the old lady—partly because of a similarity in their situations; for she also privately hoarded money, and had but one servant, and stopped at home alone on Sunday afternoons to allow her servant to go to church.

"And when did all this happen?" she asked.

"I don't know if Mr. Higgins named the day; and yet I think it must have been on this very last Sunday."

"And to-day is Wednesday. Ill news travels fast."

"Yes, Mr. Higgins thought it might have been in the London newspaper.'

"That it could never be. Where did Mr. Higgins learn all about it?"

"I don't know; I did not ask. I think he only came home yesterday: he had been south to collect his rents, somebody said."

Miss Pratt grunted. She used to vent her dislike and suspicions of Mr. Higgins in a grunt whenever his name was mentioned.

"Well, I shan't see you for some days. Godfrey Merton asked me to go and stay with him and his sister; and I think it will do me good. Besides," added she, "these winter evenings—and these murderers at large in the country—I don't quite like living with only Peggy to call to in case of need."

Miss Pratt went to stay with her cousin, Mr. Merton. He was an active magistrate, and enjoyed his reputation as such. One day he came in, having just received his letters.

"Bad account of the morals of your little town here, Jessy!" said he, touching one of his letters. "You've either a murderer among you, or some friend of a murderer. Here's a poor old lady at Bath had her throat cut last Sunday week; and I've a letter from the Home Office, asking to lend them 'my very efficient aid,' as they are pleased to call it, towards finding out the culprit. It seems he must have been thirsty, and of a comfortable jolly turn; for before going to his horrid work he tapped a barrel of ginger wine the old lady had set by to work; and he wrapped the spigot round with a piece of a letter taken out of his pocket, as may be supposed; and this piece of a letter was found afterwards; there are only these letters on the outside, '*ns, Esq., -arford, -egworth,*' which some one has ingeniously made out to mean Barford, near Kegworth. On the other side, there is some allusion to a racehorse, I conjecture, though the name is singular enough—'Church-and-King-and-down-with-the-Rump.'"

Miss Pratt caught at this name immediately. It had hurt her feelings as a Dissenter only a few months ago, and she remembered it well.

"Mr. Nat Hearn has, or had (as I am speaking in the witness-box, as it were, I must take care of my tenses), a horse with that ridiculous name."

"Mr. Nat Hearn," repeated Mr. Merton, making a note of the intelligence; then he recurred to his letter from the Home Office again.

"There is also a piece of a small key, broken in the futile attempt to open a desk—well, well. Nothing more of consequence. The letter is what we must rely upon."

"Mr. Davis said that Mr. Higgins told him"—Miss Pratt began.

"Higgins!" exclaimed Mr. Merton, "*ns.* Is it Higgins, the blustering fellow that ran away with Nat Hearn's sister?"

"Yes!" said Miss Pratt. "But though he has never been a favourite of mine"——

"*ns,*" repeated Mr. Merton. "It is too horrible to think

of; a member of the hunt—kind old Squire Hearn's son-in-law! Who else have you in Barford with names that end in *ns?*"

"There's Jackson, and Higginson, and Blenkinsop, and Davis, and Jones. Cousin! one thing strikes me—how did Mr. Higgins know all about it to tell Mr. Davis on Tuesday what had happened on Sunday afternoon?"

There is no need to add much more. Those curious in lives of the highwaymen may find the name of Higgins as conspicuous among those annals as that of Claude Duval. Kate Hearn's husband collected his rents on the highway like many another "gentleman" of the day; but, having been unlucky in one or two of his adventures, and hearing exaggerated accounts of the hoarded wealth of the old lady at Bath, he was led on from robbery to murder, and was hung for his crime at Derby, in 1775.

He had not been an unkind husband, and his poor wife took lodgings in Derby to be near him in his last moments—his awful last moments. Her old father went with her everywhere but into her husband's cell, and wrung her heart by constantly accusing himself of having promoted her marriage with a man of whom he knew so little. He abdicated his squireship in favour of his son Nathaniel. Nat was prosperous, and the helpless, silly father could be of no use to him; but to his widowed daughter the foolish, fond old man was all in all—her knight, her protector, her companion, her most faithful, loving companion. Only he ever declined assuming the office of her counsellor, shaking his head sadly, and saying—

"Ah! Kate, Kate! if I had had more wisdom to have advised thee better, thou need'st not have been an exile here in Brussels, shrinking from the sight of every English person as if they knew thy story."

I saw the White House not a month ago; it was to let; perhaps for the twentieth time since Mr. Higgins occupied it; but still the tradition goes in Barford that, once upon a time, a highwayman lived there, and amassed untold treasures,

and that the ill-gotten wealth yet remains walled up in some unknown, concealed chamber; but in what part of the house no one knows.

Will any of you become tenants, and try to find out this mysterious closet? I can furnish the exact address to any applicant who wishes for it.

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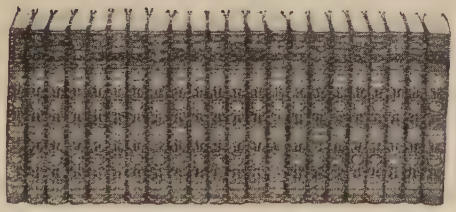

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